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Conflicts in couples: A relational needs perspective

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CONFLICTS IN COUPLES: A RELATIONAL NEEDS PERSPECTIVE

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The current dissertation aimed to build a better understanding of the origins of relationship conflict in order to provide more evidence-based insights into how such conflicts can be addressed in couple therapy. According to this general aim, a needs perspective on relationship conflict was taken and an exploration was made of how partners' frustrated needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness fuel their emotional reactions towards their partner, as well as their behavioral responses and their general levels of relationship dissatisfaction. In this introductory chapter, we will start with a definition of conflict, approaching it from a needs perspective. Consequently, we will briefly outline different perspectives on relational needs before covering our current knowledge of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in intimate relationships. Finally, we conclude this first chapter with the specific research objectives of this doctoral dissertation, while providing an overview of the different chapters.

In the research literature on intimate relationships, extensive attention has been paid to conflict between partners, as it has negative outcomes on various levels (see Fincham, 2009; Gurman, 2008). On the physical level, conflict with a partner is linked to a broad range of poor health outcomes such as increased blood pressure, poor immunological responses, and more specific ailments such as chronic pain (for an overview see Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). On the psychological level, conflict is linked to increases in depressive symptoms (Choi & Marks, 2008), anxiety disorders (Overbeek et al., 2006), substance abuse (Overbeek et al., 2006; Whisman, Uebelacker, & Bruce, 2006), and suicidality (Kaslow et al., 2000). On a relational level, associations have been found between conflict and relationship dissatisfaction over time (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007), as well as divorce rates (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & McIlvane, 2010) and partner violence (O'Leary & Slep, 2006). Given its detrimental effects, conflict within intimate relationships has now been a critical topic of investigation for many decades (e.g., Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2015).

Furthermore, conflict is often couples' main reason for seeking couple therapy. Accordingly, in overviews of existing couple therapy models, conflict management is believed to be an important factor of change and identified as a key target of interventions (see Gurman, 2008). For instance, in behavioral approaches to couple therapy such as cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (Baucom & Epstein, 1990) and integrative behavioral couple therapy (Jacobson & Christensen, 1998), one of the therapy goals is to address partners' deficits in communication and to improve their problem-solving skills in order to deal more effectively with differences of opinion and other relational stressors. In affective-reconstructive couple therapy (Snyder & Wills, 1989), the focus is also on couples' conflict-based and maladaptive behavioral patterns, which therapists attempt to turn into more empathic and supportive interactions by encouraging partners to explore each

other's underlying affective responses and reframe according to previous developmental experiences. Thus, literature on both couple research and couple therapy highlights the centrality of relationship conflict in understanding and alleviating individual and relationship distress.

A RELATIONAL NEEDS PERSPECTIVE ON CONFLICT

Although there are many definitions of conflict, varying from mismatching relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992) to an imbalance of costs and benefits (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994), many theorists and researchers agree that conflict involves some *goal interference* or *goal incompatibility* between two parties (Lewin, 1948). Applied to intimate relationships, each partner has a set of goals, needs, or preferences, which might be conscious or unconscious, general or specific, and short-term or long-term. Sometimes individuals pursue their goals while interfering with their partner's goals, whilst other times partners' goals are incompatible with each other. Although partners might be barely aware of these goals, goal interference gives rise to conflict between partners (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001). As partners are highly interdependent and in frequent contact, relationship conflict is considered an inevitable part of daily human existence (Bradbury & Karney, 2014).

Based on the conceptualization of conflict in terms of goal interference and goal incompatibility, theoretical and empirical elaborations have been made during recent decades on the kind of goals/needs partners have within their intimate relationship. These perspectives will be detailed in the following section.

Relational Needs: Theoretical Perspectives

Models of relational needs are documented in the literature of multiple fields ranging from couple therapy and couple research literature to the broader psychology literature. In the couple therapy literature for instance, Emotionally Focused Couple therapists (EFT-C) consider in accordance with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) the need for attachment, which refers to one's need for security and connection, as the most central need in intimate relationships (Johnson, 2004, 2009). Besides the need for attachment, therapists, following the Emotion-Focused Couple therapy model established by Greenberg and Goldman (2008), additionally describe that feeling fully accepted by the partner for who one is (i.e., the need for identity maintenance) and feeling desired and liked by the partner (i.e., the need for attraction and liking) are both necessary for a well-functioning and flourishing relationship.

The couple research literature also documents the role of need fulfillment in intimate relationships. For instance, Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed the need for belonging as one of the most basic needs to be fulfilled in an intimate relationship. Anchored within Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), Drigotas and Rusbult (1992) identified intimacy, emotional involvement, security, companionship, and sex, as essential relational needs in intimate relationships (see Le & Agnew, 2001; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006). Another example includes the Self-Expansion Model, in which the centrality of partners' needs for self-expansion or self-improvement in their relationship is described (Aron & Aron, 1996).

Within the broader psychological literature, one of the most prominent approaches to the conceptualization of basic psychological needs concerns Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT proposes the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as three universal needs that are essential for one's physical and psychological well-being (Chen et al., 2015; Deci & Ryan,

2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Fulfillment of these needs is important in any particular social environment, including an intimate relationship (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

As illustrated above, there is no consensus in the literature about the number and kind of relational needs that matter most within intimate relationships, nor is there consensus on which needs are cardinal in understanding intimate relationship conflict. Consequently, there is no consensus on which needs should be focused upon in couple therapy in order to be effective in alleviating relationship dissatisfaction and instability. Within the current dissertation, it was decided to focus on partners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as stipulated within the SDT framework. The reasons and considerations underpinning this choice will be outlined in the following section.

Partners' Needs for Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

First, SDT is the only needs approach in which need satisfaction and need frustration are explicitly distinguished as separate concepts, instead of being conceptualized as polar opposites (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). The distinction between need satisfaction and need frustration is essential because of its differential predictive effects; need satisfaction has been demonstrated to play a more fundamental role in well-being, whereas need frustration is regarded as a better predictor of malfunction and ill-being (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Costa, Ntoumanis, & Bartholomew, 2015; Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Boone, & Mouratidis, 2013). Regarding the specific types of needs, satisfaction of the need for autonomy in intimate relationships describes partners who feel self-governed, in possession of agency over their actions, and psychological free in their relationship. When partners feel effective in their actions and able to achieve their desired goals within the relationship, their need for competence is satisfied. Satisfaction of one's need for

relatedness refers to partners experiencing a mutual caring, stable, and loving relationship with their partner. In opposition to this, frustration of one's need for autonomy occurs when someone feels extremely controlled or coerced by their partner to behave in certain ways, against their will. Partners' need for competence is frustrated when they are made to feel inadequate or like a failure, or when they are made to doubt their capabilities. Finally, frustration of one's need for relatedness describes partners feeling lonely, disliked, or rejected by their partner (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). Thus, need dissatisfaction (i.e., opposite of need satisfaction) involves being passive and indifferent towards a partner's needs, whereas need frustration occurs when a partner more actively and directly obstructs their partner's needs. Consequently, need dissatisfaction and need frustration are asymmetrically related to each other, with need frustration covering, by definition, need dissatisfaction, whereas the opposite is not necessarily true (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

Second, SDT is one of the most comprehensive views on relational needs as many other perspectives focus solely on needs that can be captured by one of the three needs, mostly by the need for relatedness. Meanwhile the potential role of the need for autonomy and competence is often neglected. For instance, the needs described by Drigotas and Rusbult (1992; i.e., intimacy, emotional involvement, security, companionship, and sex) can all be covered by the need for relatedness. Following the same reasoning, the need for belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the need for attachment and the need for attraction and liking, as described by EFT-C therapists (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), are also very similar to the need for relatedness. On the other hand, the need for identity maintenance is described by EFT-C therapists (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008) as a composite of the need for autonomy and competence. As illustrated, none of the aforementioned perspectives give the equal attention to each of the three needs that SDT does.

Finally, the universal importance of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is confirmed by cross-cultural replication of the association between these needs and well-being (Chen et al., 2015). Although from a cultural-relativistic perspective, people in individualistic cultures are taught to benefit more from the presence of autonomy and while people in collectivistic cultures focus more on the presence of relatedness (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999), it has been found that the three needs play an equivalent role across different cultures (Chen et al., 2015). This finding supports the importance of investigating each of these three needs.

In summary, as investigating relational needs from a Self-Determination perspective entails clear benefits, we further focused on the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in intimate relationships. In what follows, an overview is given of the available empirical evidence on the association between the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness, and relationship conflict.

Relational Needs: Current Empirical Evidence

Partners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness have been linked to *relationship conflict* and related relationship outcomes such as *relationship satisfaction* and partners' *emotions* during conflict. Each of the specific associations is described in detail below.

Relational needs and relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is defined as partners' subjective evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of their relationship (Fincham, Beach, & Kemp-Fincham, 1997). This concept can be seen as closely related to conflict as conflict and relationship dissatisfaction often go hand in hand, as has been outlined by social learning perspectives on intimate relationships (Baucom & Epstein, 1989; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; see Bradbury & Karney, 2014). Thus far, studies have shown that higher levels of need satisfaction

(i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012). Furthermore, it has been found that both someone's own need satisfaction and his or her partner's need satisfaction corresponds with one's level of relationship satisfaction (Patrick et al., 2007). Moreover, a longitudinal study has shown that satisfaction of someone's relatedness need leads to increased relationship satisfaction perceived by their partner over time (Hadden, Smith, & Knee, 2013).

Relational needs and relationship conflict. In the couple research literature, conflict frequency, conflict behaviors, and conflict topics are identified as the main components of relationship conflict (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Eldridge, 2009; Neff & Frye, 2009).

Conflict frequency. Conflict frequency concerns the number of differences of opinion, disagreements, fights or arguments experienced by a couple (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007). Most of the studies on conflict frequency have focused on the outcomes (e.g., Kluwer & Johnson, 2007) of the determinants of conflict frequency, for instance relational need satisfaction, instead of the frequency of conflict in the couple per se. Patrick and colleagues found that participants who experienced greater satisfaction of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness within their intimate relationship also report having less conflict with their partner. An individual's own reported frequency of conflict was also associated with their partner's level of need satisfaction (Patrick et al., 2007).

Conflict behavior. In the conflict literature, a lot of attention is paid to how couples behave during conflict (Eldridge, 2009). These conflict behaviors are often categorized as positive and negative or as *constructive* and *destructive* (Birditt et al., 2010; Fincham & Beach, 1999). Positive, constructive behaviors include behaviors such as actively listening, working towards agreement, and raising issues in a neutral and

calm way. Negative, destructive behaviors encompass behaviors such as blaming, yelling, interrupting, and being hostile (Bradbury & Karney, 2014). Sometimes withdrawing behaviors, which refer to actively or passively disengaging from the interaction, have also been added to this classification (Birditt et al., 2010). In addition to individual conflict behavior, researchers often focus on conflict behavior of the couple, their conflict behavioral patterns. These patterns generally fall into three types: *mutual constructive* behavior (i.e., both partners are actively and constructively engaged in the discussion), *mutual avoidance* (i.e., both partners actively or passively withdraw), and *demand-withdrawal* (i.e., one partner pursues change from the other partner by blaming and criticizing, while the other partner avoids the discussion or withdraws from the interaction) (Eldridge, 2009).

Concerning the association with relational need satisfaction, a study by Patrick and colleagues (2007) focused on how people respond to conflict and demonstrated that greater satisfaction of each need is associated with more constructive responses and less destructive responses to conflict. Partner effects were also found, demonstrating that people whose partners are experiencing higher levels of need satisfaction respond in less destructive manners to conflict.

Conflict topics. In comparison to conflict behavior, less research attention has been paid to conflict topics (Kurdek, 1994), which refer to the areas that partners argue about (Neff & Frye, 2009). Kurdek (1994) identified six clusters of conflict topics: power (e.g., finances, household issues), social issues (e.g., political issues, personal values), personal flaws (e.g., smoking, driving style), distrust (e.g., previous lovers, lying), intimacy (e.g., affection, sex), and personal distance (e.g., absence, job commitments). Couples have indicated that topics concerning power and intimacy are usually the most important sources of conflict (Kurdek, 1994). To the best of our knowledge, the association between conflict topics and relational need satisfaction/frustration has not yet been a research topic in previous studies.

Relational needs and emotions. As one of the primary functions of emotions is to signal a (mis)match between the environment and one's needs (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Scherer, & Ellsworth, 2009), negative emotions act as alarms when someone's needs are incompatible or interfere with his or her partner's needs (Carver & Scheier, 1990). Emotions also prepare and motivate people to adequately react to specific circumstances (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Roseman, 2011). Following the same reasoning, various therapy models such as EFT-Cs posit emotions in a central role in the treatment of couple conflict and distress (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004). More specifically, EFT-Cs assume emotions to play a mediating role in the association between relational need frustration and relationship conflict and distress.

Regarding the association with the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, one study showed that partners whose needs are less satisfied generally experience more negative and less positive emotions (Patrick et al., 2007). Outside the context of intimate relationships, these associations have also been demonstrated (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Moreover, satisfaction of competence and relatedness needs are found to be related to less anger, sadness, and, for competence needs at least, fear (Tong et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the association between partners' negative emotions and their conflict behavior is often emphasized in the couple research literature (e.g., Gottman, 2011; Verhofstadt, Buysse, De Clercq, & Goodwin, 2005). Dividing negative emotions into hard (i.e., anger or irritation) and soft (i.e., sadness or hurt) emotions, hard emotions have been found to relate to more negative communication (i.e., criticism and defensiveness), but soft emotions have been linked to more negative communication in a far less consistent way (Sanford, 2007).

Conclusion. Taken together, the evidence on the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and relationship conflict, dissatisfaction, and

emotions is looking promising, but only a limited number of studies have been conducted. Additionally, existing findings are limited in several respects. The gaps in our knowledge on how autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs relate to relationship conflict, dissatisfaction, and emotions are outlined below, along with how our research aimed to deal with these limitations in existing studies.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF THE DISSERTATION

As described above, little is currently known about the association between relational need frustration on the one hand and relationship conflict/dissatisfaction on the other. Although a few studies have addressed *whether* relational need dissatisfaction fuel relationship conflict/dissatisfaction, less is known about *how* relational need dissatisfaction/frustration connect to these relationship outcomes. Both the emotion and couple therapy literature suggest that emotions might play a substantial role, but explicit associations have only been proposed in certain works in the couple therapy literature. More specifically, EFT-Cs assume that (a) couple conflict and relationship distress result from partners being unable to meet each other's needs, (b) unmet needs lead to negative emotions in partners, and (c) negative emotions, accompanying unmet needs, give rise to specific behaviors in partners, resulting in negative interaction cycles between partners over time. However, until now, no evidence has been available on the interplay between relational needs, emotions, and relationship conflict/dissatisfaction, which comprises our first limitation.

Second, in the current literature, little attention has been paid to the distinction between need satisfaction and need frustration. Although there are theoretical grounds by which to distinguish need (dis)satisfaction from need frustration, only studies outside the intimate relationship context have taken this

difference into account so far. These empirical studies demonstrate need satisfaction to be a stronger predictor of well-being than need frustration, and need frustration being a stronger predictor of ill-being than need satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of this distinction. Although a need frustration perspective on relationship conflict would therefore be more appropriate, no previous study on intimate relationships has adopted such a perspective.

The third limitation is methodological in nature as the studies on relational needs in intimate relationships described above has primarily relied on surveys. This is a problem as it is hard to determine the extent to which both motivational and cognitive biases may interfere with reports given by participants attempting to recall, interpret, and collect past experiences into current overall impressions of their relationship (Schwartz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998).

Fourth, in terms of the kind of participants included in the studies, the samples used in the studies described above mainly consisted of partners engaged in short-term or average-length relationships (mean relationship duration ranged from 1.06 years to 3.33 years). To our knowledge, long-term relationships have not been studied. In line with this, the most studies have tended to use young samples, usually consisting of undergraduate (psychology) students, thereby further limiting the generalizability of the findings.

In order to deal with these limitations, the main goal of this dissertation was to conduct a rigorous empirical investigation gathering data from a broad range of committed relationships of how relational needs, relationship conflict, dissatisfaction, and emotions relate to each other. More specifically, we set three sub-goals in which we examined whether (see Figure 1):

a) Higher levels of frustration of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are associated with higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction and with relationship conflict (higher conflict frequency, higher number of conflict topics, and

lower and higher levels of constructive and destructive conflict behavior, respectively).

b) Higher levels of frustration of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are associated with higher levels of sadness, fear, and anger.

c) Sadness, fear, and anger mediate the association between the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and relationship conflict (behavior).

In order to be able to draw strong conclusions, we chose not to rely on only one specific study method, instead applying divergent methodological designs, such as observational research, surveys, and recall/imagination designs. Furthermore, in our empirical studies, particular attention was paid to the distinction between satisfaction and frustration of relational needs.

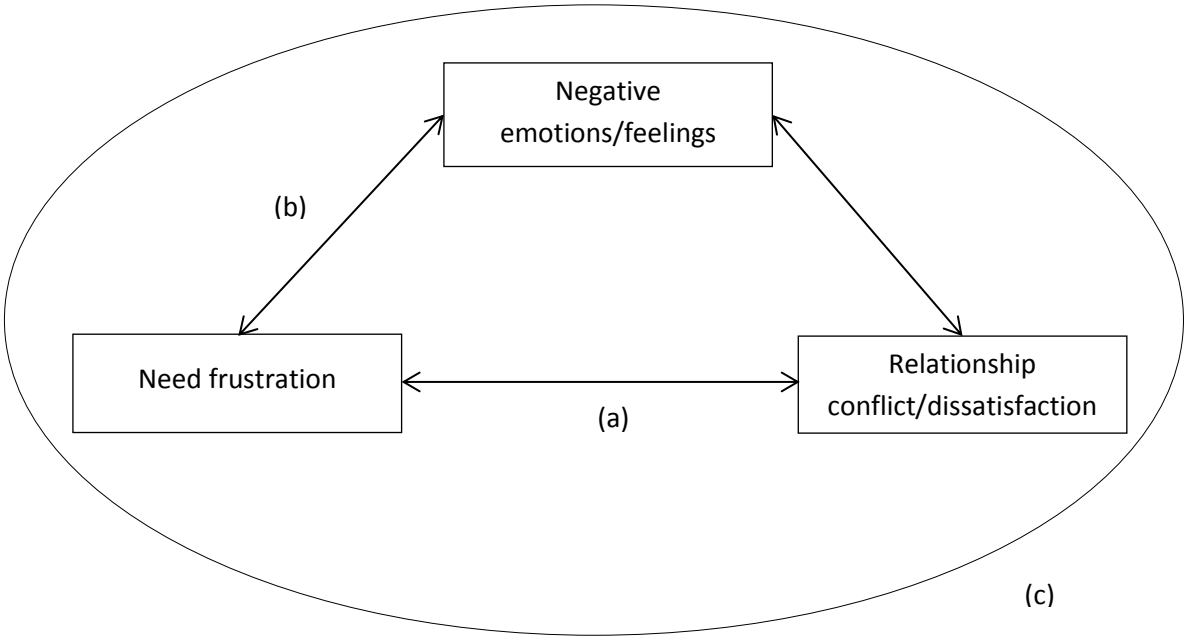

Figure 1. Overview of the three sub-goals.

Chapter Overview

In *Chapter 2*, a literature overview is provided of existing theoretical and empirical evidence on the interrelations between relational needs, relationship conflict/dissatisfaction, and emotions in intimate relationships. The starting point of this literature overview was the assumptions made by therapy models, such as EFT-Cs, outlining associations between these variables. The assumed interrelations were reviewed in light of the emotion and couple literature, setting the scene for the chapters that follow.

In the first empirical study, *Chapter 3*, the relevance of distinguishing between need satisfaction and need frustration was investigated in the context of intimate relationships. In more detail, we examined the relative value of the satisfaction and frustration of an individual's relational need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in predicting relationship satisfaction. Self-report measures of 372 heterosexual participants were analyzed.

In the remaining chapters, only frustration of relational needs was included as the focus was mainly put on relationship conflict. In comparison to previous studies on the needs-conflict link, we aimed to obtain a more comprehensive view on relationship conflict in *Chapter 4*, by investigating all of the three main components of conflict: conflict frequency, conflict topics, and conflict behavior patterns. The association between relational need frustration and relationship dissatisfaction was also addressed. The study consisted of a survey applied to a sample of 230 committed heterosexual couples. Dyadic effects as well as gender differences were explored.

In *Chapter 5,* an observational design was used to test the robustness of our findings. This study concentrated on a micro-analytic examination of the impact of frustration of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness on conflict behavior. In this chapter, individual conflict behaviors rather than couple conflict

patterns were examined to disentangle partners' behaviors. Furthermore, this study expands upon previous chapters by examining the role played by emotions, and in specific by its component of feelings, in this association. More specifically, we investigated the association between need frustration and feelings on the one hand and the role of feelings in the association between need frustration and conflict behavior on the other. A sample of 141 committed heterosexual couples was used.

Our aim to adopt a multi-methodological approach was pushed further in *Chapter 6*. In this chapter, two studies were combined, of which one used a recall design (N = 200) and one an imagination design (N = 397). Similar associations were examined to those looked at in Chapter 5 with conflict behavior tendencies investigated rather than actual conflict behaviors. A brief overview of the different empirical chapters is given in Table 1.

Finally, *Chapter 7* comprises a general discussion with an integrated overview of the main findings from the different studies. Limitations of the studies are discussed together with recommendations for future research. Implications for clinical practice as well as theoretical reflections are also outlined.

It should be noted that the present dissertation consists of several papers, which have been published or have been submitted for publication. As each of the manuscripts should be able to stand on its own, the content of some of the chapters may partially overlap.

Table 1

Overview of the Empirical Studies

	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	
				Study 1	Study 2
Sub-goal					
(a) needs - relationship conflict/dissatisfaction	(a)	(a)	(a)	(a)	(a)
(b) needs - emotions/feelings			(b)	(b)	(b)
(c) needs - emotions/feelings - conflict			(c)	(c)	(c)
Study variables	Need satisfaction Need frustration Relationship satisfaction	Need frustration Relationship dissatisfaction Conflict - frequency - topics - behaviors	Need frustration Feelings Conflict behaviors	Need frustration Feelings Conflict behavior tendencies	Need frustration Feelings Conflict behavior tendencies
N	372 individuals	230 couples	141 couples	200 individuals	397 individuals
Design	Cross-sectional	Cross-sectional	Observational	Recall-based	Imagine-based

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CHAPTER 2

EFT-C'S UNDERSTANDING OF COUPLE DISTRESS: AN OVERVIEW OF EVIDENCE FROM COUPLE AND EMOTION RESEARCH[1]

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing body of research on Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFT-C), less research attention has been paid to the validity of EFT-C's description of the relationship dynamics that characterize distressed couples. The current theoretical paper provides a narrative review of evidence from existing emotion and couple research for EFT-C's assumptions on the origin of relationship distress (according to Johnson and to Greenberg and Goldman). Our findings lead to three conclusions: First, the general assumptions outlined by EFT-Cs on need frustration, emotional responses, and interaction patterns are largely supported by the couple and emotion literature. Second, less straightforward evidence was found for the specific elaborations of these principles made by EFT-Cs. Third, a lack of systematic research on EFT-C's assumptions hampers strong conclusions. We suggest future research on this issue with attention toward current insights in the emotion and couple literature.

[1] Based on Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G. M. D., Moors, A., Hinnekens, C., & Verhofstadt, L. L. (2016). EFT-C's understanding of couple distress: An overview of evidence from couple and emotion research. *Journal of Family Therapy.* Advance online publication. doi:10.1111/1467-6427.12128

INTRODUCTION

Since its first publication about thirty years ago (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985), Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFT-C) has continued to grow and develop. Johnson's 'Emotionally Focused Therapy' (Johnson, 2004a) and Greenberg and colleagues' 'Emotion-Focused Therapy' (Greenberg and Goldman, 2008) are nowadays regarded as the two major EFT-C approaches. Despite some notable distinctions, they both view "emotion as the primary organizer of intimate relational experience, influencing significantly both interactional tendencies and patterns, and perceptions and meaning attribution" (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002, p. 224). They furthermore share, at least to some extent, three basic assumptions about what constitutes the core of couple distress: (a) Couple conflict and relationship distress result from partners being unable to meet each other's needs, (b) unmet needs lead to specific negative emotions in partners, and (c) specific negative emotions, accompanying unmet needs, give rise to specific behaviors in partners, resulting in negative interaction cycles between partners over time.

Despite the growing number of studies on EFT-C's treatment process and outcomes, especially on Johnson's approach for distressed couples: good recovery rates (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999); long-term stability of effects (Greenman & Johnson, 2013); active ingredients (such as the depth of emotional experiences) (Greenman & Johnson, 2013; Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012), the couple therapy literature contains relatively little empirical research specifically investigating EFT-C's theoretical assumptions on the origins of couple conflict and distress. Although models of effective couple therapy may not necessarily follow an understanding of the apparent causes of couple dysfunction (Eisler, 2005), establishing empirical links between the etiology and treatment of relationship distress may contribute to EFT-C further becoming a theoretically grounded, research-based therapy approach (Lebow, 2010; Nef, Philippot, & Verhofstadt, 2012).

Therefore, the goal of this paper is to examine the literature on emotions and couple functioning for empirical evidence that supports EFT-C's three main assumptions on couple conflict and distress (see above). Accordingly, in the sections to follow, a narrative review of evidence for each of these assumptions will be provided. This will be done for Johnson's and Greenberg and Goldman's therapy models separately.

Assumption 1: Couple Conflict and Relationship Distress Result from Partners Being Unable to Meet Each Other's Needs

Both therapy models take a needs perspective on distress and dissatisfaction in intimate relationships (e.g., Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004a), which assumes that partners have certain fundamental psychological needs in intimate relationships that have to be satisfied for optimal couple functioning. Moreover, couple conflict and relationship distress are regarded as resulting from partners being unable to meet each other's needs. Therefore, EFT-C therapists help partners to become aware of their own needs, to express them, and to become responsive to their partners' needs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009). Important differences between the two approaches will now be discussed.

In Johnson's approach (Johnson, 2004a), the need for attachment is seen as an overarching need that has to be fulfilled before other needs (such as sexuality) can be met. Informed by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), intimate relationships are conceptualized as attachment bonds, characterized by partners seeking closeness to and support from each other. Whether one's attachment needs will be fulfilled depends on their partner's answer to the underlying fundamental question, "Will you be there when I need you?". When one's partner is not emotionally available and responsive, the relationship will not be experienced as a secure base, attachment needs will be unmet, and relationships will become distressed (Johnson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009).

Although Greenberg and Goldman (2008) also fully acknowledge the significance of the connection and security from loved ones, they additionally stress the importance of partners' need for identity maintenance within their intimate relationship. The latter involves the validation, confirmation, and acceptance of who one is in terms of one's personality, feelings, and preferences. In their opinion, our view of ourselves, and our identity, is highly affected by significant others. Consequently, individuals are concerned about how they are perceived by their partner. The fundamental underlying question is here: "Do you accept me for who I am?". Being recognized and respected by one's partner is particularly essential as it directly impacts one's self-worth and feelings of agency and influence. On the other hand, dissatisfaction of the need for identity, like feeling disapproved and unnoticed, may lead to ruptures in the self and the relationship.

Greenberg and colleagues (2008) further state that the need for attraction and liking is also important in order to fully understand adult love. The attraction and liking motivational system encompasses affection, warmth, and liking of the partner ("Do you really like me?") and reflects a positive drive, which makes a relationship not only functional but also flourishing. Satisfaction of this need is presumed to function as a protective factor in couple conflict, thereby contributing to relationship maintenance (Goldman & Greenberg, 2013; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008).

Evidence for assumption 1. EFT-C's theoretical claims on the importance of *attachment needs* in intimate relationships are largely supported within the couple research literature. Insecure attachment to the partner has been frequently associated with relationship dysfunctioning (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, for an overview), including lower levels of relationship satisfaction, commitment, and intimacy (e.g., Davila & Bradbury, 2001; Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1994; Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004). As compared to securely attached couples, insecurely attached couples also report more conflict and less stable relationships (i.e., higher breakup/separation rates, shorter relationship duration; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Treboux et al.,

2004). Further, partner responsiveness and emotional engagement –as main characteristics of a partner satisfying the other partner's attachment needs– are key predictors of relationship quality and divorce (Gottman, 1994a; Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001; Johnson, 2004a).

The couple research literature contains little published research specifically investigating the role of *identity needs* in couple functioning. Some indirect evidence, however, may be derived from research on identity-related concepts. For instance, the finding that partners seek mutual approval within their relationship (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000) and incorporate their partner's perception of their qualities and capacities into their own identity (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995) may provide partial support for the idea of partners' crucial role in forming and maintaining each other's identity. Furthermore, partners who perceive less acceptance and positive regard by their partner, are found to feel less loved by their partner and are less satisfied with their relationship over time (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2006; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001). Evidence also comes from studies on mutual influence or equality in couples and self-esteem, which may also be considered as manifestations of maintaining one's identity. Balanced mutual influence or equal power within couples was found to be associated with greater intimacy and relationship satisfaction (Knudson-Martin, 2013; Oyamot, Fuglestad, & Snyder, 2010; Steil, 1997). Finally, high individual self-esteem was predictive of higher levels of relationship satisfaction in the long-term (Erol & Orth, 2013; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012).

To the authors' knowledge, no research has already explicitly examined what role *attraction and liking needs*, as conceptualized by Greenberg and Goldman, play in relationship outcomes. However, this type of relational needs has been conceptually linked by Greenberg and Goldman (2008) to relationship phenomena like intimacy, affection, love, and attraction, which have been broadly and reliably related to

relationship maintenance in previous studies (e.g., Mark & Herbenick, 2014; Sangrador & Yela, 2000; Sprecher, 1999).

Conclusion. Overall, we can conclude that attachment (needs) have been shown to be broadly associated with relationship outcomes, whereas empirical evidence for identity and attraction needs in couples only indirectly derives from fundamental research on conceptually associated phenomena (e.g., self-esteem, power, love) in intimate relationships.

Assumption 2: Unmet Needs Lead to Specific Negative Emotions in Partners

According to the two EFT-C approaches included in our narrative literature review, partners react in predictable emotional ways when their needs are unmet by their partner. First, so-called primary emotions, which are one's most spontaneous and original responses to unmet needs, become activated. These emotions are difficult to tolerate and make the person vulnerable. As a result they often remain unexpressed and therefore unacknowledged. At other times, they are turned into expressed, so-called secondary, emotions. These reactive emotions are individuals' defensive responses to and efforts to cope with their primary emotions (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Greenberg & Safran, 1987).

Within Johnson's approach (2004a), threats to attachment needs are assumed to evoke primary emotions such as sadness and fear in the deprived partner, which could be concealed by the expression of anger (i.e., secondary emotion). This emotional sequence resulting from unmet attachment needs is also described by Greenberg and Goldman (2008). The latter also specify the negative emotions resulting from partners' identity need struggles. The lack of being validated and respected by one's partner mainly leads to primary emotions of shame at diminishment and fear of loss of control, and more overt secondary emotions of anger and contempt. Whereas frustration of the needs for attachment and identity clearly induces distressing emotions, threats to

attraction and liking needs especially entail a lack of positive emotions, which makes relationships less flourishing but not necessarily conflictual and distressing (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008).

Because distressed partners are not likely to articulate their primary emotions, EFT-C therapists are trained to help them to down-regulate their expressed secondary emotions and to facilitate the identification and expression of their underlying, primary emotions to their partner (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004a).

Evidence for assumption 2.

The needs-emotion association. Within current emotion theories, the *general idea* that negative emotions are elicited by unmet needs is widely accepted. In particular, according to appraisal theories, emotions result from an evaluation of the environment in light of one's concerns (personal needs, goals, or values) and their primary function is to signal if there is a (mis)match between the situation and any of these concerns (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Scherer & Ellsworth, 2009). As such, negative emotions act as alarms when obstruction is detected and thereby inform partners about the satisfaction status of their needs (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Frijda, 1986; Moors, 2007; Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987). In addition to their signal function, emotions are also said to have a communicative function, in the sense that they not only signal to oneself, but also to one's partner that needs are being frustrated within the relationship (Berscheid, 1983; Izard, 1971; Parkinson, 1995).

Other need perspectives, like Self-Determination Theory, mention that negative emotions, such as anxiety, grief, and anger are typical responses to need frustration (Ryan & Deci, 2000). By the same token, research on relationship needs demonstrates that partners whose needs are less satisfied, generally experience more negative emotions and less positive emotions (Le & Agnew, 2001; Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007).

Specific unmet needs lead to specific negative emotions. Quite some evidence can be found in the couple research literature on *specific* emotions resulting from unmet attachment needs (unmet attachment needs → sadness/fear → anger) as outlined by both EFT-C's approaches. More specifically, some studies document the occurrence of sadness, anxiety, anger when partners' attachment needs are unmet (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). People were found to experience more sadness and anger in the days after a relational breakup (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). Furthermore, higher levels of sadness, anxiety, and anger are reported after being separated from the partner due to war or work concerns (Vormbrock, 1993). Rejection by one's partner (after divorce or during negative interactions) is also associated with depressive symptoms, which could be considered as a composite of anger, sadness, and anxiety (Ayduk, Downey, & Kim, 2001; Finch, Okun, Pool, & Ruehlman, 1999; Mearns, 1991). By the same token, experimental research has demonstrated that people who perceive a low level of partner responsiveness experience a higher fear response in reaction to threats (Coan, Kasle, Jackson, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2013).

The couple research literature contains little documented research on partners' specific emotions resulting from identity struggles (unmet identity needs → shame/fear → anger/contempt). Some evidence supporting this emotional sequence could be derived from one study showing that hurtful events caused by one's partner (comprising several identity threats like undermining one's self-worth and self-esteem) give rise to feelings of shame, being hurt, sadness, anger, and, to a lesser extent, fear (Feeney, 2005). Research on equity further suggests that feeling underbenefitted by one's partner is associated with the experience of anger as well as sadness (Guerrero, La Valley, & Farinelli, 2008; Sprecher, 2001).

What about existing findings from emotion research? First of all it should be noted that within the contemporary emotion literature, the idea of specific negative emotions following from specific unmet needs, as put forward by EFT-C, is not widely

accepted (e.g., Ekman, 1992; Ellsworth, 2013; Roseman & Smith, 2001; Scherer, 2009; Tracy, 2014). Instead, these theories state that neither the situation per se, nor the need per se, but instead the appraisal of the situation in light of one's needs is important in determining the kind of an emotion. For example, when important needs (independent of their particular content) are in immediate danger and action has to be quickly undertaken (independent of the specific situation), the appraisal dimension 'urgency' (Frijda, 1986) will be high. In case of high urgency, emotions such as fear are likely to arise, whereas emotions such as sadness will be associated with low urgency appraisals (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). Empirically, there is abundant evidence for appraisal theories, demonstrating that specific appraisal patterns, and not the type of need that is frustrated, differentiate between specific emotions (e.g., van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2002).

Our literature review also pointed at some theorists nuancing this perspective by arguing that some types of needs are typically more related to some emotions than others. For instance, Scherer (1988) suggested that a mismatch with self-esteem (conceptually related to identity needs) is more likely to elicit anger, whereas a mismatch with safety needs (conceptually related to attachment needs) is more plausible to provoke fear. Despite this theoretical differentiation, emotion research has thus far not yet demonstrated the particular links between attachment or identity needs on the one hand and specific emotions such as anger, shame, fear as predicted by EFT-C, on the other hand.

Primary emotions lead to secondary emotions. As appraisals are thought to be crucial in emotion differentiation (as described above; Ellsworth, 2013; Scherer, 2009), the hypothesized sequence in terms of primary and secondary emotions is hardly supported within the emotion literature. Instead, many current emotion theories state that every emotion can be replaced by any other emotion, depending on the specific additional appraisals that are made (Ellsworth, 2013; Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). For example, anger can develop into fear as the situation is not, or no longer, appraised as

possible to cope with (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). This idea of cognitive reappraisal is further well-documented by neuroimaging studies of emotion regulation strategies (see Ochsner & Gross, 2005, for an overview).

Conclusion. In sum, both theoretical and empirical arguments from the emotion and couple research literature support the general idea that unmet needs produce negative emotions, as outlined by existing EFT-Cs. However, the specific associations outlined by both types of EFT-C, as well as the hypothesized sequence of primary and secondary emotions, do receive little conceptual/empirical support within the current emotion literature. Nevertheless, for specific emotions resulting from unmet attachment needs evidence does have been found in the couple research literature.

Assumption 3: Specific Negative Emotions, Accompanying Unmet Needs, Give Rise to Specific Negative Interaction Cycles between Partners

Both approaches to EFT-Cs argue that people's emotions, especially their reactive secondary emotions, lead to destructive behaviors towards the partner in an attempt to cope with and to protect against need frustration. The partner will consequently react to these behaviors in a defensive way, which maintains the first partner's reactive emotions and associated behaviors (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004a, 2005). As a result, partners get stuck in negative vicious circles, further reinforcing the frustration of each other's needs and undermining the relationship (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004a).

In Johnson's therapy model (2004a, 2008), attachment insecurity accompanied by reactive anger is described to lead to demand-withdrawal, mutual demand, and mutual withdrawal interactional cycles. These cycles are anchored within attachment theory in which demanding behavior is seen as resulting from anger and as being part of protest against separation, and aimed at increasing the partner's availability and responsiveness (Bowlby, 1969). One partner pursues emotional closeness by blaming,

criticizing, and controlling the other partner, and the latter either seeks distance or withdraws as a way of emotional protection (demand-withdrawal) or reacts with a counterattack (demand-demand). As attachment needs remain frustrated by such interactions, partners mutually reinforce each other's behavior and become stuck in one of these negative interactional cycles (Johnson, 2004a, 2008). Over time, the demanding partner may stop his/her desperate attempts to elicit a response from the withdrawing partner and also withdraws, which results in a mutual withdrawal pattern (withdrawal-withdrawal).

In Greenberg and Goldman's (2008) therapy model, a distinction is made between behavioral patterns situated on the so-called affiliation dimension (closeness vs. distance) and those on the so-called influence dimension (dominance vs. submissiveness) (Benjamin, 1996; Leary, 1957). Similar to Johnson's approach, negative cycles following on attachment struggles are situated on the affiliation axis (varying from closeness to distance). The influence dimension comprises negative interaction cycles, mainly involving anger and contempt, which result from unmet identity needs. The most common of these negative interaction cycles is dominance-submissiveness in which one partner tries to preserve his/her identity and to coerce acceptance by trying to control and dominate the other partner, while the latter complies and submits. The more the latter engages in passive, submissive behavior, the more the other partner takes control, resulting in less and less identity-validating interactions. This dominance-submissiveness may eventually evolve into interaction cycles in which both partners either fight for the lead (dominant-dominant) or want to convince the other partner that they are the weakest (submissive-submissive).

EFT-C therapists thus help couples to recognize and de-escalate these negative interaction cycles and the accompanying reactive secondary emotions. Subsequently, therapists assist couples in creating new patterns of positive interactions by accessing and expressing unacknowledged primary adaptive emotions and, after a reprocessing of

the emotional experiences, to re-negotiate both partners' interactional positions (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 1999, 2004a; Johnson et al., 2005).

Evidence for assumption 3.

Negative emotions and interaction cycles. Several studies in the couple research literature support the association between negative emotions in general and conflict behavior (e.g., Gottman, 1994a, 1994b, 2011; Verhofstadt, Buysse, De Clercq, & Goodwin, 2005). Moreover, one's experience or perception of harsh emotions in the partner (i.e., anger and irritation) leads to more negative communication (e.g., defensiveness, criticism) and less positive (e.g., constructive discussion) communication in the couple (Sanford, 2007). Some studies also show that emotions like anger, sadness, and fear are specifically related to demand-withdrawal cycles in couples (Knobloch-Fedders, Critchfield, Boisson, Bitman, & Durbin, 2014; Papp, Kouros, & Cummings, 2009). Furthermore, couples of which one partner was depressed reported more mutual withdrawal than non-clinical couples (Lemmens, Buysse, Heene, Eisler, & Demyttenaere, 2007). Associations between specific negative emotions and other types of interaction cycles (e.g., demand-demand) remain unexamined in the couple research literature.

EFT-C's *general* notion about emotions as the engine of one's behavior is also compatible with some emotion theories. According to these theories, emotions are considered as mental states that motivate people towards specific actions and interactions by means of action tendencies and bodily reactions (e.g., Roseman, 2011; Smith & Lazarus, 1990; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006). However, other theorists (e.g., Moors, 2009) nuance this causal assumption as they argue that action tendencies and expressive behavior are components of emotion and therefore cannot be seen as consequences of emotions.

Also regarding the *specific* associations between emotions and behaviors, as outlined by EFT-C, some theoretical debate is going on in the emotion literature. For instance, contemporary appraisal theories (Moors, 2014; Scherer, 2009) and

psychological constructivist theories (Barrett, 2012; Russell, 2003) argue that a specific emotion label (e.g., fear) is not uniquely related to a specific behavior (e.g., withdrawing). However, others found evidence for some emotions (or emotion labels) being more associated with particular action tendencies and behaviors than others (e.g., Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Smits, & De Boeck, 2003). For instance, anger has found to be more strongly related with tendencies to move against or attack someone (e.g., Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Roseman, 2011; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994) and to be more associated with approach than withdrawal behaviors (Harmon-Jones, 2003). On the contrary, contempt proved to be more related to behavior aimed at moving other people away, for instance, by denigrating them (Fischer & Roseman, 2007), which resembles dominant behavior described in EFT-Cs.

Unmet needs and interaction cycles. Regarding the link between partners' need frustration and a couple's interaction cycles, couple research shows an association between insecure attachment (needs) to the partner and problematic conflict resolution (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Insecurely attached couples tend to report more demand-withdrawal and mutual withdrawal in their relationship as compared with securely attached couples (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). Insecure partners have also been found to use more coercion and verbal aggression, tactics related to demanding behavior (Feeney, 1994; Senchak & Leonard, 1992). However, and in contrast with the EFT-C framework, a more insecure attachment style is not only linked to more demanding and withdrawing behaviors but also to more dominant behavior (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000; Creasey & Ladd, 2005) and to the use of complementary obliging strategies (Shi, 2003). As far as we know there is no empirical research relating identity threats to dominant-submissive interaction cycles in couples.

Conclusion. Taken together, there are both theoretical and empirical grounds coming from the couple and emotion literature for EFT-C's general idea of partners' negative emotions being linked to couples' interaction patterns. For the associations

between specific emotions and demand-withdraw/dominant-submissive cycles, little theoretical and empirical support can be found. As an important exception, the couple research literature provides evidence for the specific emotions related to demand-withdrawal. Regarding the association between unmet needs and interaction cycles, it should be noted that rather inconsistent evidence is found for the association between unmet attachment needs and demand-withdrawal, whereas dominant submissive cycles resulting from unmet identity needs has not yet been researched.

DISCUSSION

First, we can conclude that the *broad interpretation* of the three dynamics that characterize distressed couples, as outlined by EFT-Cs, is largely supported within the couple and/or emotion literature. That is, the idea of partners' unmet needs leading to relationship conflict/distress and to negative emotions, as well as the idea of negative emotions giving rise to interaction cycles is generally accepted at the theoretical and empirical level within the couple and emotion literature.

Second, more direct empirical evidence is currently available for Johnson's approach (2004a) than for Greenberg and Goldman's (2008) approach. This is—at least to some extent—due to the fact that Johnson's approach is strongly anchored in attachment theory, an overarching theoretical framework that received systematic and rigorous examination outside the couple therapy literature as well. Multiple disciplines (e.g., family psychology, emotion research) have studied attachment within intimate relationships, thereby providing converging evidence for Johnson's general idea of attachment needs being central in our understanding of couple distress. Equal support is therefore available for the part of Greenberg and Goldman's model that focuses on attachment. Greenberg and Goldman's assumptions on the role of identity and attraction needs on the other hand have rarely been the topic of investigation in

fundamental research. A lack of research to promote Greenberg and Goldman's assumptions is of course different from falsification of these assumptions so future research should systematically evaluate the importance of identity and attraction needs as well.

Moreover, it should be noted that the (in)directly demonstrated importance of attachment, identity and attraction/liking needs does not exclude the possibility that the fulfillment or frustration of other relational needs may also be of importance in understanding relationship distress. Also other needs perspectives, developed within the broader psychological literature, such as the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) receive growing empirical evidence. SDT states that the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness has to be fulfilled in intimate relationships in order to form high quality relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2014). As the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are found to be universal human needs (as shown by cross-cultural studies; e.g., Vansteenkiste, Lens, Soenens, & Luyckx, 2006), and existing studies underscore their relevance in predicting relationship outcomes—higher levels of relationship satisfaction and commitment (Patrick et al., 2007; Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012; Vanhee, Lemmens, & Verhofstadt, 2016b), less conflict and better conflict resolution (Patrick et al., 2007; Vanhee, Lemmens, Stas, Loeys, & Verhofstadt, 2016a), and higher levels of support seeking during emotional experiences (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005)—it may be possible that these relational needs are currently disregarded in existing EFT-Cs. Therefore, a challenge for both EFT-C researchers and practitioners will be to reconsider the current assumptions and practice of EFT-C in light of other theoretical perspectives on need satisfaction/frustration in couples.

By the same token, the reviewed evidence for demand-withdrawal patterns resulting from unmet attachment needs does not preclude that these patterns may also be the expression of couples' attempts at dealing with unmet identity needs.

Theoretically, it is assumed that the partner whose needs are frustrated, independent of the type of need, will desire change from the other partner (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). Indeed, both clinical observation and empirical research show that partners who are in the so-called agent of change position typically display demanding behavior (such as complaining and pressuring for change; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993), irrespective of the required area of change (Verhofstadt et al., 2005). The possibility that frustration of needs other than solely attachment needs may lead to demand and/or withdrawal cycles, should be investigated more thoroughly to avoid the risk of tackling the interaction cycle itself in therapy, thereby trying to solve the symptom (i.e., demand and/or withdrawal cycle) but not the cause (i.e., specific need that is frustrated) (Vanhee et al., 2016a).

Third, although the couple and emotion literature largely support the *general* idea of unmet needs leading to negative emotions and negative emotions leading to interaction cycles, empirical grounds for the *specific* associations between them (e.g., unmet identity needs → shame/fear → anger/contempt) are rather mixed or non-existent. In fact, few studies are available that actually test these specific predictions. Therefore, a systematic and rigorous analysis of the specific needs-emotions-behaviors sequence, as outlined by EFT-Cs, is warranted. For instance, future research should also focus on exploring potential gender differences in these specific associations (e.g., Parker, Johnson, & Ketring, 2012). At the moment, available theoretical and empirical evidence does underscore the importance of exploring and addressing the broad range of negative emotions in couples and not only the specific emotions outlined by both EFT-Cs.

Finally, as the current couple and emotion literature provides no straightforward theoretical and empirical support for the hypothesized sequence of primary and secondary emotions, which is central to both approaches, more systematic research into this issue is warranted. As appraisals are crucial in emotion differentiation, it might be

more interesting to focus on this component in therapy, in addition to the emotion word (e.g., anger) per se.

Next to appraisals, emotions further consist of bodily reactions, action tendencies, motoric expressions, and feelings, which can be labeled with emotion words (Moors, 2009). Some influential emotion theories, such as contemporary appraisal theories (Moors, 2014; Scherer, 2009) and psychological constructivist theories (Barrett, 2006; Russell, 2003) do not assume fixed, coherent sets of components for each emotion. Therefore, it might be interesting to investigate whether and how particular unmet needs are associated with specific emotion components and how these components are related to interaction cycles.

Conclusion

Our analysis definitely provides empirical and theoretical support for, at least some of, EFT-C's assumptions on the origins of couple distress. However, a lack of specific and systematic research into important issues hampers a conclusive review about the empirical validity of EFT-C's assumptions. Future research should therefore subject these assumptions, some of which are largely theoretically based, to rigorous empirical testing. Important issues within Greenberg and colleagues' approach are—to our knowledge—largely unexamined, but also some of the specific assumptions made by Johnson need to be the focus of systematic examination. More research can further contribute to the validation of EFT-C's theoretical underpinnings and to the efficacy of our efforts to treat relationship distress.

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CHAPTER 3

RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION: HIGH NEED SATISFACTION OR LOW NEED FRUSTRATION?[1]

ABSTRACT

Despite existing theoretical and empirical grounds for a needs perspective on intimate relationship functioning, little is currently known about the role of relational need frustration, especially as compared to need satisfaction. Therefore, our aim in the present study was to investigate the relative value of the satisfaction and frustration of an individual's relational needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in predicting relationship satisfaction. Self-report measures were completed by 372 men and women, each of whom was involved in a committed heterosexual relationship. Results indicated that (a) need satisfaction and need frustration both contributed to relationship satisfaction, with need satisfaction being the stronger predictor of greater satisfaction, and (b) the satisfaction or frustration of the need for relatedness was the only significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. The results for both men and women were similar. In sum, these

[1] Based on Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G. M. D., & Verhofstadt, L. L. (2016). Relationship satisfaction: High need satisfaction or low need frustration? *Social Behavior and Personality, 44*, 923-930. doi:10.2224/sbp.2016.44.6.923

results imply that couple interventions should focus on reinforcing relatedness satisfaction as well as on reducing relatedness frustration in both male and female partners.

INTRODUCTION

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) people have psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that have to be fulfilled by their partners in order to form high quality intimate relationships (Knee, Porter, & Rodriguez, 2014; La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). In several studies testing this assumption, greater relational need satisfaction did, indeed, prove to be associated with better relationship outcomes (e.g., less conflict, better conflict resolution, greater relationship satisfaction, greater commitment, more secure attachment to the partner, and more emotional reliance on the partner; La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005; Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012). Each of the specific SDT needs has been found to be a unique predictor of relationship outcomes, but satisfaction of the need for relatedness tends to be most strongly associated with relational outcomes (Patrick et al., 2007).

Hence, although there are theoretical and empirical grounds for a needs perspective on intimate relationship functioning, an important gap in the literature can be identified. More specifically, as all published researchers that we identified have focused on need satisfaction in relationships, little is currently known about the role of need frustration within intimate relationships, especially as compared to need satisfaction. This is an important issue, as both satisfaction and frustration of needs might have unique value in predicting relationship outcomes. Conceptually, need satisfaction and need frustration are regarded as separate concepts instead of polar opposites (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). *Relational need frustration* involves more actively and directly undermining a partner's needs, as compared to more passively not satisfying one's needs (i.e., absence of need satisfaction; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). As delineated by La Guardia and Patrick (2008), frustration of relational needs

occurs when partners feel controlled or pressured to behave in a certain way (i.e., autonomy frustration), have induced feelings of failure and doubts (i.e., competence frustration), and feel rejected and abandoned by their partner (i.e., relatedness frustration), whereas *relational need satisfaction* involves partners experiencing a sense of volition and psychological freedom (i.e., autonomy satisfaction), a feeling of effectiveness and mastery to attain desired goals (i.e., competence satisfaction), and a successful stable bond with their partner in which they feel loved (i.e., relatedness satisfaction).

To summarize, empirical evidence is available on the association between need satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, and a conceptual distinction is made between the satisfaction and the frustration of one's relational needs. However, to the best of our knowledge, no previous researchers have investigated the differential role of relational need satisfaction and need frustration in explaining relationship satisfaction. Our aim in the current study was, therefore, to examine the prediction that the satisfaction, as well as the frustration, of one's relational needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) would contribute positively (satisfaction) and negatively (frustration), to satisfaction with one's intimate relationship. Therefore, we formed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Satisfaction of one's relational needs will contribute positively, and frustration of one's relational needs will contribute negatively, to satisfaction with one's intimate relationship.

Furthermore, researchers of individual outcomes have shown that, compared to need frustration, need satisfaction is more strongly related to positive individual outcomes (e.g., growth, well-being) and that, compared to need satisfaction, need frustration is more likely to predict negative individual outcomes (e.g., malfunctioning, ill-being; see, e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2011; Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani,

2011; Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Boone & Mouratidis, 2013). We, therefore, formed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Relational need satisfaction will be a better predictor of relationship satisfaction than will relational need frustration.

On the basis of the findings of Patrick et al. (2007), we further formed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Satisfaction as well as frustration of one's need for autonomy, competence, or relatedness will be predictive of relationship satisfaction, but the need for relatedness will be the strongest predictor of relationship satisfaction.

In addition, we explored whether there are gender differences in these relationship variables (Research Question 1).

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

A team of four research assistants recruited a sample of 141 Belgian men and 231 Belgian women by means of a network-sampling technique. Each research assistant recruited participants within his/her social network by means of a paper or electronic standard information letter containing a description of the purpose of the study, inclusion criteria, and research ethics. Each participant was requested to introduce the study to other potential participants either by word-of-mouth or by showing them the information letter. People interested in taking part were asked to complete an Internet-based survey. All participants were currently involved in a committed heterosexual relationship that had been established for at least one year. The age of the men ranged from 18 to 77 years (*M* =

38.70, *SD* = 14.23) and the age of the women ranged from 18 to 74 years (*M* = 31.16, *SD* = 13.35). The men had been in their current relationship for 1 to 49 years (*M* = 14.00, *SD* = 11.83) and the women had been in their current relationship for 1 to 48 years (*M* = 10.58, *SD* = 11.57).

Measures

Participants' satisfaction and frustration levels of autonomy (α = .72/.79), competence (α = .61/.78), and relatedness (α = .89/.76) were assessed with the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS; Chen et al., 2015) adapted for use within intimate relationships. The 24 items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely untrue) to 5 (completely true). Participants' relational need satisfaction and need frustration scores are computed by averaging scores for all items included in specific subscales; scores range between 1 and 5, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of need satisfaction and need frustration, respectively.

Relationship satisfaction was measured by the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983). Participants rate five statements about their relationship on a 7- point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and respond to one item asking them how happy they are with their relationship on a 10-point scale (1 = very unhappy, 10 = perfectly happy). Participants' relationship satisfaction score is computed by summing their scores for all items (α = .94), with scores ranging between 6 and 45, and higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction.

Data Analysis

Preliminary to hypotheses testing, means and standard deviations of the study variables were computed and *t* tests were performed to examine possible gender differences. To address the research hypotheses, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with participants' satisfaction and frustration scores for autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, and gender as predictors and participants' relationship satisfaction score as the dependent variable. Relationship duration was entered in the first step in order to control for its possible effects, given its association with relationship satisfaction (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). In the second step, participants' need satisfaction/need frustration scores and gender were entered (H1, H2, and H3). Finally, possible interactions between gender and need satisfaction/need frustration were examined in the third step (RQ1). To investigate multicollinearity, variance inflation factors (VIF) were computed. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 23.

RESULTS

Participants generally reported high relationship satisfaction, high relational need satisfaction, and relatively low relational need frustration (see Table 1). No significant gender differences were found for these variables. The correlation coefficients between the study variables are showed in Table 2.

The results of the regression analysis showed that the addition of the variables in the third step did not add significantly to the R^2. Therefore, this step was excluded from the analysis reported below. The results of computing the VIFs indicated no multicollinearity (ranging from 1.03 to 2.32). After controlling for relationship duration, entering gender and participants' autonomy, competence, and relatedness satisfaction and frustration scores in

the second step, accounted for an additional 66% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, F_{change} (7, 363) = 104.69, $p < .001$ (see Table 3). Overall, the model was found to be significant, F (8,363) = 94.34, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .68$. In the final model, relationship duration was significantly and positively associated with relationship satisfaction, $\beta = .09$, $p < .01$. Furthermore, the satisfaction or frustration of participants' need for relatedness made a significant contribution to the model, with higher levels of relatedness satisfaction, $\beta = .64$, $p < .001$, as well as lower levels of relatedness frustration, $\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$, being associated with greater levels of relationship satisfaction. The regression coefficients showed that satisfaction of relatedness contributed more to the prediction of relationship satisfaction than did frustration of relatedness (.64 vs. -.23). Overall, we did not find either main effects of gender or any interaction effects between gender and the variables under study.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	Men (*n*=141)		Women (*n*=231)		Comparison test	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t (370)*	*p*
Relationship satisfaction	39.81	5.32	39.23	6.61	0.88	.38
Autonomy satisfaction	4.13	0.53	4.22	0.57	-1.48	.14
Autonomy frustration	1.83	0.77	1.78	0.77	0.64	.52
Competence satisfaction	4.14	0.55	4.19	0.56	-0.84	.40
Competence frustration	1.70	0.72	1.66	0.72	-0.57	.57
Relatedness satisfaction	4.49	0.59	4.51	0.73	-0.33	.74
Relatedness frustration	1.51	0.67	1.49	0.69	0.39	.70

Table 2

Correlations between the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Relationship satisfaction		.40**	-.39**	.39**	-.35**	.80**	-.73**
2. Autonomy satisfaction	.59**		-.49**	.60**	-.47**	.43**	-.34**
3. Autonomy frustration	-.51**	-.58**		-.31**	.48**	-.47**	.40**
4. Competence satisfaction	.42**	.58**	-.49**		-.55**	.41**	-.35**
5. Competence frustration	-.50**	-.55**	.64**	-.55**		-.33**	.43**
6. Relatedness satisfaction	.77**	.62**	-.62**	.48**	-.53**		-.72**
7. Relatedness frustration	-.56**	-.52**	.67**	-.46**	.60**	-.64**	

Note. Correlations for women are presented above the diagonal; correlations for men are presented below the diagonal.

** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Explaining Relationship Satisfaction

Step	Predictor	*B*	SE *B*	*β*	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2
1					.02	.02*
	Relationship duration	-0.01	0.00	-.14*		
2					.67	.66**
	Relationship duration	0.00	0.00	.09*		
	Autonomy satisfaction	0.88	0.46	.08		
	Autonomy frustration	0.43	0.33	.05		
	Competence satisfaction	0.06	0.44	.01		
	Competence frustration	-0.24	0.35	-.03		
	Relatedness satisfaction	5.83	0.42	.64**		
	Relatedness frustration	-2.03	0.40	-.23**		
	Gender	-0.66	0.39	-.05		

Note.* $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$; R^2total = .68, $F(8,363) = 94.34$**

DISCUSSION

Our analyses led us to four main conclusions. First—and in line with Hypothesis 1—satisfaction and frustration of relational needs independently and significantly contributed positively and negatively, respectively, to explaining relationship satisfaction. Second, as predicted in Hypothesis 2, compared to need frustration, need satisfaction appeared to be a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction. As such, our findings converge with the theoretical (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013) and empirical suggestions (Bartholomew et al., 2011a, 2011b) distinguishing between need satisfaction and need frustration, given their different associations with human functioning and malfunctioning. Moreover, our findings in this study extend existing research by confirming the differential role of need satisfaction and need frustration in relational well-being, as distinct from individual well-being.

However, our analyses also led us to a third conclusion (cf. Hypothesis 3): On its own, we found that the need for relatedness played a crucial role in predicting relationship satisfaction. Although, according to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) relatedness, autonomy and competence needs all matter in intimate relationships, our findings suggest that an individual's need for relatedness with his or her partner is the most important of these. This is in line with findings reported by Patrick et al. (2007) and makes sense from a conceptual point of view, as interdependence is the key feature defining intimate relationships (Bradbury & Karney, 2014). Finally, our results suggest that in intimate relationships both men and women get the same benefit from need satisfaction and suffer similarly from need frustration (cf. RQ1). Men as well as women reported feeling more satisfied with their relationship when they felt both cared for (i.e., greater relatedness satisfaction) and not rejected by (i.e., less relatedness frustration) their intimate partner. Also of interest to us was the finding that relationship duration contributed positively to relationship satisfaction,

which contrasts with the decline of relationship satisfaction over time documented in previous longitudinal studies (see Gottman & Notarius, 2002). However, the difference in our finding may have been as a result of the inclusion of mostly non-distressed individuals in our study or may have resulted from the cross-sectional design used in our study, so that we were assessing the relationship at only one point in time.

A limitation in our study was that our sample consisted of highly satisfied and heterosexual-oriented individuals, thereby limiting somewhat the generalizability of the results. Replication of these findings with samples that are more heterogeneous will be important. It will also be valuable in future research to examine the mechanisms underlying the needs-relationship satisfaction association including a more detailed and in-depth assessment of relationship processes (e.g., relationship conflict) than the one we used in the current study. Thirdly, the temporal order of the processes under investigation could not be tested with the present data, which are correlational in nature and measured at a single time point. The possibility exists that greater relationship satisfaction leads to more satisfaction and less frustration of partners' needs, rather than the other way around. The usual recommended caution should, therefore, be exercised in inferring causality from our results, as the issue of causal ordering needs to be resolved in future research using longitudinal designs. Additionally, we relied exclusively on participants' global self-reports, which are potentially misleading because of cognitive and motivational biases. Future researchers should, therefore, rely on methods that allow more detailed reports to be collected with little time delay, for example, diary research on daily feelings about need satisfaction/need frustration and relationship satisfaction.

Despite its limitations, our work is potentially valuable for the insights offered regarding interventions or therapy with couples. First, it sheds light on the degree to which happiness in relationships is determined by partners' passive responsiveness, as well as

active unresponsiveness, to each other's relational needs. Both these elements of a relationship should be dealt with in couple therapy. Second, our findings on the cardinal role of relatedness needs in determining how the participants in our study evaluated their relationship, point to the importance of couple therapists focusing primarily on reinforcing the intimate, loving bond between partners (i.e., relatedness satisfaction) and on reducing partners' cold and rejecting behavior (i.e., induction of relatedness frustration). Third, the finding that relatedness needs are equally important for both men and women in their relationship evaluation, contradicts the widespread belief that men and women are seeking different things within an intimate relationship. For example, according to intuitive, everyday wisdom (lay theories), to which many people subscribe, it is often assumed that experiencing care, love, and intimacy is valued more by women, whereas men mainly value autonomy and a feeling of psychological freedom. Because our finding that men and women place the same level of importance on the need for relatedness is, perhaps, counterintuitive, couple therapists should be aware of this, as it may help them to bridge the gap between partners in the early stages of therapy, when they are finding a problem definition and setting therapy goals shared by both partners. Finally, more research is needed on a potential theoretical implication of our findings, that is, the suggestion that the general assumption in the SDT of the equal importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs in human functioning warrants some nuancing within the context of intimate relationships.

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CHAPTER 4

WHY ARE COUPLES FIGHTING? A NEED FRUSTRATION PERSPECTIVE ON RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT AND DISSATISFACTION[1]

ABSTRACT

The present study investigated whether partners' frustration of relational needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness was associated with relationship dissatisfaction and conflict (frequency, topics, communication patterns). Self-report measures were completed by 230 committed heterosexual couples. APIM and regression analyses revealed that (1) need frustration is associated with how dissatisfied partners are with their relationship, how frequently they initiate conflict, and how they communicate during conflicts, but not with the number of conflict topics, (2) relatedness frustration matters most, whereas only limited evidence was found for autonomy and competence frustration, (3) both one's own and one's partner's need frustration play a role in dissatisfaction and conflict, and (4) although most of the results were consistent across gender, gender

[1] Based on Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G. M. D., Stas, L., Loeys, T., & Verhofstadt, L. L. (2016). Why are couples fighting? A need frustration perspective on relationship conflict and dissatisfaction. Journal of Family Therapy. Advance online publication. doi:10.1111/1467-6427.12126

differences were found for how need frustration affects couples' conflict communication. Therapeutic implications are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Mary comes home after a hard day's work and starts talking about it to her partner, Richard. After a while, she has the impression that he is no longer listening to her. She feels not supported by him and starts blaming him for it. In his turn, Richard becomes increasingly angry and replies that she is always going on about her work and that he has already told her several times to look for another job. He tells her that he also had a busy day and needs some time and space for himself, but that is something that she does not seem to understand. Both partners experience more and more feelings of frustration, anger and rejection, leading to vicious cycles of conflicts, undermining their relationship over time.

This vignette illustrates a frequently observed phenomenon in clinical as well as non-clinical couples experiencing relationship conflict and dissatisfaction. Over the past decades, many theories have been proposed by both couple researchers and therapists to explain why couples are fighting and arguing. They vary from poor communication skills over mismatching relational schemas to an imbalance of costs and benefits (Baldwin, 1992; Clarkin & Miklowitz, 1997; Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994). An explanation that has received increasing attention states that relationship conflict and dissatisfaction may originate from partners being unable to satisfy each other's needs. Indeed, many contemporary couple therapies regard need fulfillment as central in intimate relationships. For instance, Sue Johnson's Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy strongly emphasizes the need for attachment, referring to one's need for security and connection (see Johnson, 2009). Additionally, the fulfillment of partners' need for identity maintenance (i.e., being fully accepted by the partner for who one is) and for attraction and liking (i.e., feeling desired and liked by the partner) is an important treatment focus in Leslie Greenberg and Rhonda Goldman's Emotion-Focused Couples Therapy (see Greenberg & Goldman, 2008).

Evidence for the importance of relational need fulfillment is also found in the couple research literature. For example, Arthur and Elaine Aron's Self-Expansion Model points to the centrality of partners' need for self-expansion or self-improvement in their relationship (Aron & Aron, 1996). Anchored within Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), Drigotas and Rusbult's work (1992) describes the needs for intimacy, emotional involvement, security, companionship, sex, and self-worth as essential in intimate relationships (see Le & Farrell, 2009).

Another interesting perspective on need fulfillment in intimate relationships derives from Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT argues that people have three universal psychological needs, essential for their physical and psychological well-being: the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Chen et al., 2015; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Fulfillment of these needs is important in any particular social environment, including the intimate relationship (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

Need Satisfaction and Frustration in Couples

SDT makes an explicit distinction between need satisfaction and need frustration in intimate relationships, as partners can be either supportive or frustrating towards each other's needs. More specifically, a lack of need satisfaction involves being indifferent towards the partner's needs, whereas need frustration involves a more active and direct way of undermining the partner's needs (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Regarding the specific types of needs, satisfaction of one's need for autonomy refers to partners feeling a sense of volition, willingness, and agency in their pursuits, perceiving their behaviors as authentic and personally endorsed, and experiencing psychological freedom in their intimate relationship (i.e., autonomy satisfaction). However, the need for autonomy is frustrated when individuals feel controlled by their partner or pressured to behave in a

certain way (i.e., autonomy frustration). When the need for competence in intimate relationship is satisfied, partners experience effectiveness and mastery in their actions and feel capable of attaining desired goals in their relationships (i.e., competence satisfaction). On the contrary, one's competence need is frustrated when the partner has vague and unreasonable expectations and provokes feelings of failure and doubts (i.e., competence frustration). Finally, satisfaction of one's need for relatedness reflects partners experiencing a successful stable bond with the partner, in which one feels cared for and loved (i.e., relatedness satisfaction). This need will be frustrated when partners are cold, rejecting and distant towards each other and when they incite tension and loneliness in the relationship (i.e., relatedness frustration) (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

Thus far, studies have demonstrated that greater need satisfaction (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) within intimate relationships leads to better relationship outcomes, including more relationship satisfaction and commitment (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012), less conflict and more constructive responses to conflict (Patrick et al., 2007), and more willingness to rely on the partner for emotional support (Ryan, La Guardia, Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005). Further, the need for relatedness has frequently been reported to be the best predictor of relational outcomes (Patrick et al., 2007; Vanhee, Lemmens, & Verhofstadt, 2016). Finally, there is preliminary evidence for the dyadic interplay of both partners' level of need satisfaction in determining relationship outcomes. Patrick et al. (2007) found that relationship satisfaction, perceived conflict, and defensive responding to conflict was not only predicted by one's own level of need fulfillment (i.e., actor effects) but also by the partner's level of need fulfillment (i.e., partner effects). By the same token, fulfillment of one's relatedness needs also leads to increased relationship satisfaction in the partner over time (Hadden, Smith, & Knee, 2013).

The Present Study

Despite the theoretical and empirical grounds for a needs perspective on relationship functioning, several important gaps in the literature can be identified. First, SDT's theoretical claim of relational need frustration, in contrast with need satisfaction, contributing to relationship outcomes remains little investigated. Second, while several studies have documented that partners' unmet needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness affect their general level of relationship dissatisfaction (i.e., how dissatisfied people globally are with their relationship; Bradbury & Karney, 2014), few studies have actually examined to what extent these unmet needs are predictive of *how often* partners disagree, *what* they disagree about, and *how* they disagree. The latter outcomes have been identified within the couple research literature as the three main components of relationship conflict: conflict frequency, conflict topics, and conflict patterns, respectively (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Eldridge, 2009; Neff & Frye, 2009). Getting a more evidence-based understanding of the basic needs underlying relationship conflict is important for therapists as conflict is often couples' main reason for seeking therapy. Further, it is strongly related to relationship dissatisfaction and one of the main targets of intervention in couple therapy (see Booth, Crouter, & Clements, 2001; Bradbury & Karney, 2014). A third limitation of previous research on relational need fulfillment is that most studies are exclusively conducted within samples of undergraduate students, thereby limiting the generalizability of existing findings to long-term intimate relationships (Hadden et al., 2013; Patrick et al., 2007).

The aim of the current study was to obtain a more detailed picture of partners' unmet needs than existing research revealed thus far by (1) examining partners' need frustration instead of need fulfillment, (2) assessing partners' general level of relationship dissatisfaction as well as specific elements of relationship conflict (frequency, topics,

patterns), and (3) studying committed relationships instead of short-term relationships. Hereby, gender and dyadic effects were also taken into account.

Based on existing studies on need fulfillment in couples, our predictions were as follows. Higher levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness frustration within partners will be associated with higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction (H1). Relatedness frustration was expected to be the strongest predictor of relationship dissatisfaction (H2). We also hypothesized that individuals who report higher levels of need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) will more frequently initiate conflict with their partner (H3) and report more topics they initiate conflict about (H4). We also expected higher levels of need frustration in both partners to be associated with more destructive (i.e., demand-withdrawal, man demand-woman withdrawal, woman demand-man withdrawal, mutual avoidance and withholding) and less constructive communication patterns during conflict (H5). Dyadic effects were taken into account by exploring whether, besides an individual's own level of need frustration, their partner's level of need frustration also contributes to the individual's level of relationship dissatisfaction and conflict (RQ1). Additionally, as a point of major empirical and clinical interest, we explored potential gender differences in the hypothesized associations described above (RQ2).

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 230 Belgian heterosexual couples involved in an intimate relationship for at least one year. The couples were solicited by using three methods. First, the majority of the couples (*n* = 186) were recruited by a team of research assistants by means of a network-sampling technique. That is, each research assistant recruited

participants within his/her social network and each participant was requested to introduce the study to other potential participants. Second, the study was placed on a list of studies in which students in psychology/medicine (with their partner) could participate in order to earn course credits (*n* = 28). Third, to assure a certain degree of variance in our variables of interest (i.e., high level of relationship dissatisfaction and conflict), couples seeking therapy in general welfare centers were also solicited by couple therapists (*n* = 16). The demographic characteristics of the participants are reported in Table 1. The average relationship duration (*M* = 11.23 years) of the couples participating in the current study was very similar to previously published research on committed relationships (e.g., Verhofstadt, Buysse, & Ickes, 2007). Furthermore, Levin, Whitener, and Cross (2004) divided relationships into 'short relationships' (= three months), 'average-length relationships' (= twenty months), and 'long relationships' (= nine years). Applying this type of categorization to the current sample's relationship duration results in 0 per cent of the couples in a so-called 'short term relationship', 11 per cent in a so-called 'average-length relationship', and the majority of the sample having a relationship that is more than average in length.

Procedure

After providing their informed consent, partners of each couple were asked to independently complete an internet-based survey. For practical reasons, paper-and-pencil questionnaire administration was used for the couples recruited by couple therapists. Participants recruited through the network-sampling technique participated voluntarily in the study; the subsamples recruited by means of the course credit list and the couple therapists were compensated with course credits and €30 for participation, respectively. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	Men				Women			
	M	*SD*	*Range*	%	*M*	*SD*	*Range*	%
Age (in years)	34.66	13.35	18-73		32.50	12.80	18-63	
Education level								
- No higher education				56%				44%
- Bachelor degree				24%				40%
- Master degree				20%				16%
Professional activities								
- Blue collar worker				22%				8%
- White collar worker				43%				47%
- Self-employed				11%				5%
- Student				17%				34%
- Unemployed [a]				7%				6%

	Couple			
	M	*SD*	*Range*	%
Relationship duration (in years)	11.23	10.99	1-47	
Family situation				
- Living apart				34%
- Married/co-habiting without children				24%
- Married/co-habiting with children				42%

Note. [a] contains unemployed, disabled, retired, and stay-at-home wife/man.

Measures

Participants provided questionnaire data on demographics, relationship and individual functioning. Only the variables of interest to the current study are described here.

Need frustration. Relational need frustration was assessed by three subscales of the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS; Chen et al., 2015), which was adapted for use within intimate relationships. Each subscale consists of four items and measures respondents' frustration of the following three needs: (1) autonomy (e.g., "In the relationship with my partner, most of the things I do feel like I have to"), (2) competence (e.g., "In the relationship with my partner, I have serious doubts about whether I can do things well"), and (3) relatedness (e.g., "In the relationship with my partner, I sometimes have the impression that s/he dislikes me"). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (completely untrue) to 5 (completely true). Participants' subscales scores were computed by averaging their responses across all items with higher scores reflecting higher levels of need frustration. Cronbach's alpha indicated good internal consistencies for autonomy (.78), competence (.80), and relatedness frustration (.74).

Relationship dissatisfaction. Relationship dissatisfaction was measured by the six-item Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983). The first five items (e.g., "Our relationship is strong") were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The sixth item required respondents to indicate how happy they were with their relationship on a 10-point scale (1 = very unhappy, 10 = perfectly happy). Total scores were obtained by reversing and adding all the item scores, ranging between 6 and 45 with higher scores reflecting higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction (α = .92).

Conflict frequency. Participants rated frequency of conflict initiation (i.e., "How often do you initiate conflict, disagreement, fight or argument, with your partner about problems in your relationship?") by means of a 6-point scale (1 = less frequent than once a month, 2 = once a month, 3 = every two weeks, 4 = once a week, 5 = twice a week, 6 = more frequent than twice a week).

Conflict topics. Participants were asked to indicate how often they initiate conflict with their partner about 26 different topics, using a 5-point scale (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). The topics (e.g., trust, previous partners, finance) were derived from previous work on sources of conflict within intimate relationships (Kurdek, 1994). To create an index of the number of topics participants initiated conflict about, the ratings of each item were first recoded into a binary score (0 = initiates no conflict about this topic, comprising a rating of 1 and 1 = initiates conflict about this topic, comprising ratings of 2 to 5). In a next step, the number of conflict topics selected by each participant were summed (scores ranged between 0 and 26, $\alpha = .88$).

Conflict patterns. Conflict patterns within the couple were assessed by the 35-item Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which interaction patterns occur in their relationship during three stages of conflict (the emergence, the occurrence, and the post discussion phase of a relational problem), by means of a 9-point Likert-type scale (1 = very unlikely, 9 = very likely). In the current study, the following subscales were computed: (1) mutual constructive communication (i.e., both partners are actively involved in the conflict), (2) mutual avoidance/withholding (i.e., both partners actively avoid and/or passively withdraw from the conflict), (3) total demand/withdraw (i.e., one partner actively pursues change in the other partner, while the latter avoids/withdraws from the conflict), (4) man demand/woman withdraw, and (5) woman demand/man withdraw. The total

demand/withdraw communication scale is the sum of the two last scales. As the reports of both partners did not significantly differ, their reports for each subscale were averaged to obtain couple-level scores. Higher scores on each subscale reflect a higher likelihood of the particular conflict pattern occurring within the couple. Cronbach's alphas for the subscales mutual constructive communication (.75), mutual avoidance and withholding (.59), man demand/woman withdraw (.65), woman demand/man withdraw (.68), and total demand/withdraw communication (.70) were rather low but consistent with other studies (Christensen, Eldridge, Catta-Preta, Lim, & Santagata, 2006; Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008).

Data Analytic Strategy

To assess the simultaneous effect of one's own and one's partner's level of need frustration on one's own and one's partner level of relationship dissatisfaction, and level of conflict initiation (frequency and number of topics), the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) was used. More specifically, we fitted for each of those outcomes an APIM with actor and partner effects of autonomy frustration, competence frustration and relatedness frustration, relationship duration (in years) and gender as predictors, taking into account the interdependence of the partners. Because the variables conflict frequency and conflict topics were heavily skewed count outcomes, we relied on Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) assuming a Poisson distribution (Loeys & Molenberghs, 2013) instead of the linear mixed model framework that is typically used for the APIM with Gaussian dyadic outcomes. Furthermore, the scores for conflict frequency were rescored from 1-6 to 0-5. The significance of effects was assessed using the robust Wald-test. Note that the estimated coefficients from the models for the count outcomes should be interpreted on the logarithmic scale. This means that the exponentiated

coefficients indicate how much the rate of conflict frequency or topics increases (when the coefficient is positive) or decreases (when the coefficient is negative) for a one-unit increase in the corresponding predictor. To assess whether actor and partner effects of need frustration were equal for males and females, we fitted a second series of models with additional interaction terms between gender and actor/partner effects of need frustration.

Furthermore, as conflict communication patterns were quantified at the couple level, APIM analysis was not appropriate and a multivariate linear model was fitted for the five conflict communication patterns with autonomy frustration, competence frustration and relatedness frustration from both partners, and relationship duration (in years) as predictors. To assess the effect of each of these predictors on those five outcomes simultaneously, we relied on Wilks' Lambda and its F-statistic. To avoid an inflation of type 1-errors, the effects of a predictor on each of the communication patterns were only assessed provided the overall effect of that predictor was significant. All analyses were performed using R version 3.2.0.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

No significant gender differences were found for autonomy, competence, and relatedness frustration and relationship dissatisfaction ($p > .05$), whereas conflict frequency and topics did differ across gender ($p < .001$) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

	Men		Women		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*Difference*-test
Autonomy frustration	1.99	0.78	1.92	0.85	1.05
Competence frustration	1.76	0.76	1.87	0.84	-1.67
Relatedness frustration	1.50	0.68	1.55	0.71	-0.89
Relationship dissatisfaction	12.03	5.50	12.26	6.18	0.58
Conflict frequency †	1.25	1.09	1.57	1.24	3.87***
Conflict topics †	4.40	5.06	2.18	3.64	-5.25***
	Couple				
	M	*SD*			
Constructive communication	8.94	8.02			
Total demand/withdrawal	22.73	7.85			
Man demand/woman withdraw	9.84	4.65			
Woman demand/man withdraw	12.89	5.05			
Avoidance/withholding	8.55	3.63			

Note. † Because of skewed outcomes, z-test from GEE (assuming Poisson distribution) rather than t-test was used.

*** $p < .001$.

Preliminary Analyses

Correlation coefficients between need frustration, relationship dissatisfaction, conflict frequency, and conflict topics are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Correlations of Need Frustration, Relationship Dissatisfaction, Conflict Frequency, and Conflict Topics

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Autonomy frustration	.26***	.61***	.62***	.47***	.26***	.23***
2. Competence frustration	.53***	.26***	.54***	.36***	.30***	.21***
3. Relatedness frustration	.63***	.54***	.35***	.57***	.29***	.18***
4. Relationship dissatisfaction	.50***	.45***	.64***	.44***	.39***	.17*
5. Conflict frequency	.31***	.24***	.39***	.38***	.45 ***	.22***
6. Conflict topics	-.03	.04	.01	.07	.12	.40***

Note. Correlations for women are presented above the diagonal; correlations for men are presented below the diagonal. Correlations between men and women are presented on the diagonal.

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Need Frustration and Relationship Dissatisfaction (H1 & H2)

Consistent with the first prediction that need frustration would positively contribute to relationship dissatisfaction, APIM analyses (see Table 4) showed that men and women who reported higher levels of autonomy frustration and relatedness frustration and whose partner reported higher levels of relatedness frustration were more dissatisfied with their relationship. As predicted (H2), relatedness frustration appeared to be the best predictor. One-unit increase in one's own and one's partner's relatedness frustration amounted to about a 3.9 and 1.5 increase, respectively, in relationship dissatisfaction as opposed to a 0.9 increase for one's own autonomy frustration. Furthermore, a longer relationship duration was found to be associated with less relationship dissatisfaction.

Need Frustration, Frequency of Conflict Initiation (H3), and Number of Conflict Topics (H4)

As predicted (H3), we also found a positive association between relatedness frustration from both partners and conflict frequency, indicating that when one's own and

one's partner's need for relatedness were frustrated, individuals reported initiating conflict with their partner more frequently. A one-unit increase in one's own and one's partner relatedness frustration increased the frequency of conflict initiation with 1.2 (= factor exp(0.18)) and 1.21 (= factor exp(0.19)), respectively. The effects found for relationship duration and gender indicated that longer relationship duration was associated with less conflict initiation and that women reported more conflict initiation than men. Contrary to our predictions (H4), none of the need frustration measures affected the amount of topics partners initiate conflict about. A gender effect was found, indicating that women reported initiating conflict about a smaller number of topics than men.

Gender Interactions (RQ2)

Finally, none of the aforementioned actor and partner effects were significantly different between men and women (all *p*-values for the gender interactions >.05).

Need Frustration and Conflict Patterns (H5)

A multivariate linear regression analysis revealed that autonomy frustration of men and women, F (5,213) = 25.4, $p < .001$, and F (5,213) = 11.9, $p < .001$, competence frustration of men, F (5,213) = 3.67, $p < .01$, and relatedness frustration of men and women, F (5,213) = 5.3, $p < .01$, and F (5,213) = 9.9, $p < .001$, had an overall effect on the five communication patterns during conflict. Table 5 shows that women's relatedness frustration was the strongest predictor for each of the five communication patterns separately. The more women's need for relatedness is frustrated, the less couples use constructive communication and man demand/woman withdraw communication, and the more they use destructive communication (i.e., avoidance and withholding, woman

demand/man withdraw, and total demand/withdraw communication). The same results were found for relatedness frustration of men (except for the man demand/woman withdraw pattern). Additionally, an effect of men's (but not women's) autonomy and competence frustration was found, indicating that higher levels of autonomy frustration in men were predictive of less constructive communication and more avoidance and withholding in the couple and higher levels of competence frustration in men were predictive of more man demand/woman withdraw and total demand/withdrawal in the couple.

Table 4

APIM Analyses Assessing the Association between Need Frustration, Relationship Duration and Female Gender and Relationship Dissatisfaction and Conflict Outcomes

	Relationship dissatisfaction	Conflict frequency	Conflict topics
	B (SE)	*B* (SE)	*B* (SE)
Own autonomy frustration	0.95 (0.35)**	0.07 (0.05)	0.04 (0.08)
Own competence frustration	0.31 (0.40)	0.06 (0.05)	0.13 (0.08)
Own relatedness frustration	3.89 (0.55)***	0.18 (0.06)**	-0.00 (0.09)
Partner's autonomy frustration	-0.60 (0.32)	0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.09)
Partner's competence frustration	0.21 (0.36)	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.08)
Partner's relatedness frustration	1.54 (0.52)**	0.19 (0.06)***	-0.00 (0.09)
Duration (years)	-0.04 (0.02)*	-0.01 (0.00)**	-0.00 (0.01)
Female	0.22 (0.35)	0.22 (0.06)***	-0.46 (0.08)***

Note. Coefficients of relationship dissatisfaction have to be interpreted on a linear scale. Coefficients of conflict outcomes have to be interpreted on a Poisson scale.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Univariate Regression Analyses Assessing the Associations between Need Frustration (from both Men and Women) and Relationship Duration and Conflict Communication Patterns

Predictor	Constructive communication *B* (SE)	Avoidance/ withholding *B* (SE)	Man demand/ woman withdraw *B* (SE)	Woman demand/ man withdraw *B* (SE)	Total demand/ withdrawal *B* (SE)
Men's autonomy frustration	-1.55 (0.66)*	0.72 (0.34)*	0.37 (0.46)	-0.10 (0.53)	0.36 (0.78)
Women's autonomy frustration	0.28 (0.67)	0.10 (0.35)	-0.44 (0.47)	-0.26 (0.54)	-0.28 (0.79)
Men's competence frustration	-0.09 (0.62)	-0.37 (0.32)	0.90 (0.43)*	0.79 (0.50)	1.65 (0.72)*
Women's competence frustration	-0.41 (0.64)	0.03 (0.33)	-0.42 (0.45)	0.44 (0.52)	0.33 (0.76)
Men's relatedness frustration	-2.98 (0.74)***	1.58 (0.38)***	-0.82 (0.52)	1.21 (0.59)*	2.21 (0.87)*
Women's relatedness frustration	-5.60 (0.79)***	1.73 (0.41)***	-2.59 (0.55)***	1.79 (0.64)**	3.35 (0.93)***
Duration	0.07 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.07 (0.04)

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Overall, these findings led us to our *first* conclusion that frustration of relational needs matters in intimate relationships. It is related to how dissatisfied partners are with their relationship, how frequently they initiate conflict with their partner, and how they try to solve these conflicts. Our findings on conflict and relationship dissatisfaction are converging in terms of their association with need frustration, which is understandable given the fact that relationship conflict and dissatisfaction are strongly intertwined and main targets of intervention in couple therapy (Booth et al., 2001; Bradbury & Karney, 2014). Our findings complement theoretical assertions and findings on relational needs (Patrick et al., 2007; Uysal et al., 2012; Vanhee et al., 2016) by providing empirical evidence for SDT's assumption that a relationship is not only affected by partners' passive indifference towards each other's needs (i.e., need dissatisfaction) but also by partners' more active and direct attempts to undermine each other's needs (i.e., need frustration) (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Both should be dealt with in couple therapy but the question remains if need satisfaction and frustration should be addressed simultaneously or consecutively in therapy and how they both may differently influence treatment outcome.

However, our analyses also led us to a *second* major conclusion that there seems to be differential effects of need frustration on relationships, depending on the kind of need that is frustrated. Although SDT assumes that the need for relatedness, autonomy and competence matter in intimate relationships, our findings suggest that relatedness frustration matters most in determining partners' evaluation of their relationship, the amount of relationship conflict, and how constructively or destructively conflicts are dealt with within the relationship. The cardinal role that was found for relatedness frustration in

our study coincides with previous findings (Patrick et al., 2007; Vanhee et al., 2016) and makes sense from a conceptual point of view, as interdependence between partners is the key feature defining intimate relationships (Bradbury & Karney, 2014). The current findings also point to the importance of couple therapists staying primarily focused on reducing partners' cold and rejecting behavior (i.e., induction of relatedness frustration).

Moreover, not only one's own relatedness frustration but also the extent to which one's partner's need for relatedness is frustrated affects how one feels about and acts in his or her intimate relationship. These findings extend previous findings (Hadden et al., 2013; Patrick et al., 2007) by demonstrating the importance of both partners' relatedness frustration not only for relationship dissatisfaction, but also for conflict frequency and conflict communication (constructive and destructive). These findings underscore the dyadic nature of need frustration in couples, which is the *third* conclusion of our investigation. These results demonstrate the importance of having *both* partners present during couple therapy sessions, in order to assess and target the reciprocal influence between partners in terms of feelings of need frustration and dissatisfaction. However, given the finding that *one*'s relatedness frustration affects his or her own as well as his or her partner's level of relationship distress and conflict, individual therapy focusing on a client's need frustration can already be helpful for improving how both partners feel about their relationship and interact with each other.

Although need frustration is valuable in explaining relationship conflict and dissatisfaction, it should be noted also that some of our predictions were not confirmed. First, autonomy and competence frustration proved to be less consistent predictors of the outcomes under investigation. More specifically, autonomy frustration was associated with more dissatisfaction and with less constructive and more destructive (i.e., avoidance and withholding) conflict strategies (only in men). Competence frustration (only in men) was

associated with more man demand/woman withdraw and total demand/withdraw communication. This rather limited evidence for autonomy and competence frustration, as compared to relatedness frustration, does not imply that these needs are irrelevant in understanding why couples argue. It might be that autonomy and competence frustration are better correlates of relationship outcomes within highly distressed couples. Feelings of autonomy and competence may reflect an identity dimension (i.e., acceptance of who one is) (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008). This dimension might be at stake when a partner's distress has spread from "I hate my relationship" to "I hate my partner", thereby not only disapproving the relationship but also the partner as a person. Therefore, it might be important in clinically distressed couples to also address controlling behavior (i.e., autonomy frustration) and attempts at inducing feelings of failure and inferiority in the partner (i.e., competence frustration). However, further investigation on this issue is warranted. Second, no evidence was found for need frustration being related to the number of topics partners initiate conflict about. These null-findings might also result from the non-distressed nature of our sample, as the spreading of conflict across multiple areas within the relationship is a phenomenon that is typically observed in distressed couples (Bradbury & Karney, 2014; Gottman, 1979).

Our *final* conclusion concerns differences between men and women. The main effects of gender showed that women, as compared to men, initiate more conflict with their partner and that these conflicts cover less divergent topics. These results may indicate that women more frequently mention to their partner what bothers them in the relationship than men do, which may result in inducing the required change in the partner/relationship and thus reducing the number of sources of conflict. Men may be less inclined to initiate discussion with their partner, resulting in irritations and annoyances not getting ventilated and an accumulating number of areas of conflict (see also Eldridge & Christensen, 2002).

Being aware of this gender-specific way of dealing with conflict may help couple therapists to disentangle partners' polarized conceptions about one another (e.g., "she nags all the time", "when we have conflict, he criticizes everything") that hampers a collaborative and adequate conflict management.

Furthermore, the associations found in our study between need frustration on the one hand and relationship dissatisfaction and conflict frequency on the other hand were comparable between men and women. Our results on the major importance of relatedness frustration and the additional importance of autonomy frustration for both genders' relationship dissatisfaction level, are opposed to the widespread belief that mainly women value their relationship on the basis of experienced care, love, and intimacy and that especially men benefit from feeling autonomous and free in their relationship (Kite, 2009). Couple therapists should be aware of these—perhaps counterintuitive—similarities and should support both male and female partners' need for autonomy and relatedness, especially when couples are highly distressed and have a lot of arguments.

Besides these striking similarities, some differences between men and women were detected in how their need frustration shows through in the conflict communication of the couple. As already mentioned, conflict patterns in the couple are fuelled by both men and women's relatedness frustration, but also by men's autonomy and competence frustration. Thus, when improving a couple's conflict resolution skills in therapy, men and women's relatedness issues as well as men's additional autonomy and competence issues should be acknowledged as forces underlying the couple's way of communicating.

Also interesting was the finding that partners who were in their relationship for a longer period, were less dissatisfied and reported less conflict initiation. These converging findings contrast with the decline of relationship satisfaction and the stability of conflict frequency over time documented in previous longitudinal studies (e.g., Canary et al., 1995;

Gottman & Notarius, 2002). However, our findings may be resulting from the cross-sectional design used in our study.

Limitations

Despite the several strengths of this study, some limitations should be noted. First, in the current study we used a sample that included mainly non-clinical and generally satisfied couples, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results. Due to our small subsample of couples seeking couple therapy, the current data did not allow us to test for potential differences between non-clinical and clinical couples in these associations under investigation. An important goal for future research will be to replicate these findings with larger samples seeking couple therapy. Further, because our data are correlational in nature and were measured at a single time point, the usual recommended caution should be exercised in inferring causality from our results. The issue of causal ordering needs to be resolved in future research. Finally, this study examined participants' self-reports of communication patterns during conflict. This is a problem to the extent that cognitive and motivational processes bias the reports of respondents who attempt to recall, interpret, and aggregate past experiences into current overall impressions (Schwartz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998). In order to obtain a better understanding of need frustration and conflict behavior observational methods are required.

Conclusion

Our findings clearly point to relational need frustration—and most significantly relatedness frustration—as one of the engines of conflict and relationship dissatisfaction in couples. Couple therapists are recommended to take a needs perspective during the case-

formulation and intervention stages of therapy as it may allow them to focus on more covert underlying relational issues.

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CHAPTER 5

NEED FRUSTRATION AND DEMANDING/WITHDRAWING BEHAVIOR DURING RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY ON THE ROLE OF SADNESS, FEAR, AND ANGER[1]

ABSTRACT

To date, research on the link between need frustration and conflict in intimate relationships has exclusively relied on self-report methods. Therefore, the primary aim of the current study was to investigate the association between frustration of partners' relational needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and demanding/withdrawing behavior during observed conflict interactions. The second aim was to explore the role of negative feelings (sadness, fear, and anger) within this association. We conducted an observational study with a sample of 141 couples. Partners provided questionnaire data and participated in a filmed conflict interaction task. In a video-review task they reported on their subjective need frustration and feelings during the interaction. As hypothesized, the results indicated that higher levels of interaction-based need frustration as a whole were associated with

[1] Based on Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G. M. D., & Verhofstadt, L. L. (2016). *Need frustration and demanding/withdrawing behavior during relationship conflict: An observational study on the role of sadness, fear, and anger.* [Submitted paper]

higher levels of observed demanding behavior (in both men and women) and withdrawing behavior (in women only). Only in women, unique associations were found between autonomy and relatedness frustration on the one hand and demanding behavior on the other. For both men and women, higher levels of autonomy and competence frustration were associated with higher levels of anger during conflict interactions. In addition, for male partners, scoring higher on relatedness frustration was related to higher levels of sadness and fear during conflict. For female partners, higher levels of autonomy frustration correlated with experiencing higher levels of fear during conflict. Our third hypothesis, in which we expected that higher levels of interaction-based negative feelings would be associated with higher levels of observed demanding/withdrawing behavior, was only confirmed for anger in men and women. In women, higher levels of interaction-based fear were associated with lower levels of observed demanding behavior. Finally, a full mediating role was demonstrated for anger in the association between autonomy frustration and demanding behavior during conflict interactions, but only for women.

INTRODUCTION

"I had a terrible day at work but he didn't seem to care about. It really made me feel sad and angry at the same time. When he asked me when I would start preparing dinner, I became furious and told him to make dinner himself."

"Sometimes, my wife doesn't seem to care about my opinion. Recently, she enthusiastically told me about a trip to the mountains she wanted to organize for the whole family, even though she knows I'm not into hiking. She didn't ask for my opinion and I really felt unheard and hurt. I told her she was being selfish and left the room."

These vignettes describe episodes of conflict that typically occur in both distressed and non-distressed couples. The reasons why couples experience conflict vary from poor communication skills (Clarkin & Miklowitz, 1997) through mismatching relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992) to an imbalance of costs and benefits (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994).

Another explanation, which has recently been receiving increasing attention, states that relationship conflict may arise from partners being unable to fulfill each other's relational needs (e.g., Johnson, 2004). Recent research examining this hypothesis has indeed revealed that frustration of partners' need for relatedness is associated with a higher conflict frequency in couples, and less constructive, more avoidant, and more demanding-withdrawing behavior during conflict. Furthermore, in men only, higher levels of autonomy frustration were associated with less constructive and more avoidant conflict behavior in couples, whereas higher levels of competence frustration were associated with a tendency for demand-withdrawal (Vanhee, Lemmens, Stas, Loeys, & Verhofstadt, 2016b). An earlier study on this topic has already documented relational need satisfaction (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) as a correlate of less perceived conflict, more

understanding, and less defensiveness after conflict (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007).

Despite the promising nature of this research, it has relied primarily on partners' self-reports of relational need frustration and conflict in surveys. This is a problem as it is hard to determine the extent to which both motivational and cognitive biases may interfere with reports of partners attempting to recall, interpret, and collect past conflict episodes into a description of their general experiences of need frustration and conflict within their relationship (Hinde, 1997; Schwartz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998). The latter should be clearly distinguished from partners' behavioral reactions and temporary feelings of frustration experienced in relation to a specific conflict interaction. Therefore, replication of these findings is needed with observational methods that allow an objective analysis of couples' conflict behavior and a more immediate and interaction-based assessment of partners' need frustration during conflict.

Observational research is also particularly useful for studying feelings that may accompany need frustration and conflict behavior. This would be especially valuable for couple therapists, as emotional regulation takes a central place in the processes of change as described by emotion-focused therapies for couples (EFT-Cs; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004). Recent efforts at summarizing the literature on need frustration, and the negative feelings accompanying couples' interactional patterns during conflict, however, have revealed that—despite the popularity of EFT-Cs—there has been little rigorous empirical investigation on this topic (Vanhee, Lemmens, Moors, Hinnekens, & Verhofstadt, 2016a).

Accordingly, in the current study, we wanted to expand on existing knowledge of need frustration and relationship conflict. More specifically, we wanted to examine if there is evidence for a link between need frustration and conflict within the context of real

conflict interactions, by observing partners' conflict behavior (particularly demanding/withdrawing behavior) and by using measures of partners' interaction-based need frustration (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). The second objective of this study was to explore the role of partners' interaction-based feelings (sadness, fear, and anger) in this link. In the following paragraphs, we provide some background on these major features of the study.

Relational Need Frustration

Several relational need perspectives can be found in the literature on couple therapies as well as the research on couples in general. Within the couple therapy literature, Johnson's Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy strongly emphasizes the need for attachment (see Johnson, 2009). Additionally, the fulfillment of partners' needs for identity maintenance, as well as for attraction and liking are all important treatment focuses in Greenberg and Goldman's Emotion-Focused Couples Therapy (see Johnson, 2009). Within the couple research literature, the Self-Expansion Model highlights how key the partners' need for self-expansion or self-improvement are within their relationships (Aron & Aron, 1996), whereas Drigotas & Rusbult (1992) describe the needs for intimacy, emotional involvement, security, companionship, sex, and confirmation of self-worth as essential features of intimate relationships (see Le & Farrell, 2009). Another interesting perspective is anchored within Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), which states that the fulfillment of partners' need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is essential to relationship well-being (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

Among these various models that can be found in the literature on this topic, only the latter conceptually distinguishes between partners being supportive of, and *frustrating* each other's needs. Instead of considering need satisfaction and need frustration as polar

opposites, SDT regards them as separate and yet related asymmetrical concepts (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Where need dissatisfaction involves being passive and indifferent towards the partner's needs, need frustration involves more actively and directly obstructing them. Consequently, need frustration implicates, by definition, need dissatisfaction, whereas the opposite is not necessarily true (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). So, frustration of the need for autonomy occurs when a partner is extremely controlling and pressures the other to behave in a certain way. One's need for competence is frustrated when partners are subject to vague and unreasonable expectations, feeling over challenged and when feelings of failure and self-doubt are induced. Finally, frustration of the need for relatedness occurs when partners feel rejected by or distanced from each other, and if a sense of loneliness and abandonment is allowed to flourish (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

The distinction between need satisfaction and need frustration is crucial as need satisfaction has already proved to be more robustly related to indicators of individual well-being (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011) and relational well-being (Vanhee, Lemmens, & Verhofstadt, 2016c), whereas need frustration is regarded as a better predictor of malfunction and ill-being (Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Boone, & Mouratidis, 2013). So, for the purposes of the current study, a *need frustration* perspective was considered more suitable than the need satisfaction perspective taken in all other models, given the focus on couples' conflict interactions. In fact, a recent survey study compiled by Vanhee and colleagues (2016b) showed that partners' levels of need frustration (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were broadly related to multiple indicators of couple conflict (i.e., self-reported frequency and behavior).

Relational Need Frustration and Demanding/Withdrawing Behavior

Two frequently observed categories of behavior during couple's conflict interactions, are demanding and withdrawing behavior (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995). Demanding behavior consists of accusing, blaming, and pressuring the other to change, in a critical manner. Withdrawing behavior involves avoidance, unwillingness to deal directly with the issue, and withdrawal from the interaction (see Eldridge & Christensen, 2002 for an overview). Demanding and withdrawing behavior are considered as the most destructive behavior that can be expressed during couple conflicts, as they both have been linked to relationship distress (e.g., Eldridge, 2000) and partner violence (e.g., Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999).

But how might one's demanding/withdrawing behavior during conflict result from one's level of relational need frustration? A theoretical and clinical explanation can be found in dominant couple therapy models, such as emotion-focused therapies for couples (EFT-C's; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004) where demanding and/or withdrawing behavior in couples are assumed to result from partners' unmet attachment needs. Empirical support for the link between relational need frustration and demanding behavior can be derived from general conflict literature, which shows that people who desire change from their partner or in their relationship typically display behaviors meant to elicit change in their partner, such as accusing, complaining, and pressuring for change (i.e., demanding behavior; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Papp, Kouros, & Cummings, 2009), irrespective of what changes are required (Verhofstadt, Buysse, De Clercq, & Goodwin, 2005a). More direct evidence comes from the survey study by Vanhee and colleagues (2016b), in which was found that when men's need for competence and women's need for relatedness were frustrated, they were reportedly more demanding towards their partners during conflict. On the other hand, when criticizing and complaining

do not achieve the desired change, partners are often found to become involved in a cascade of contempt, defensiveness, and finally emotional withdrawal and refusal to engage in discussions (Gottman, 1994a). Initial support for withdrawing behavior occurring in cases of need frustration was found in survey research, with higher levels of withdrawing behavior during conflict occurring as a result of frustrated relatedness needs (in men and women) and autonomy needs (in men) (Vanhee et al., 2016b).

Relational Need Frustration and Negative Feelings

In the emotion literature, feelings are regarded as resulting from an evaluation of the environment in light of one's needs (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Scherer & Ellsworth, 2009). As the primary function of feelings is to signal a (mis)match between the environment and one's needs, negative feelings act as alarms when obstructions are detected. As such, individuals are informed about their level of need frustration (Carver & Scheier, 1990). Furthermore, feelings also have a communicative function, in the sense that expressing negative feelings also signals to one's partner that needs are being frustrated within the relationship (Keltner & Haidt, 1999).

Accordingly, SDT posits that when people detect threats to their need fulfillment, they typically respond with a variety of negative feelings, such as anxiety, grief, and anger (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, one maladaptive mechanism for coping with need frustration is pursuing more extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, goals (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013), which are associated with more anxiety and more symptoms of depression (Kasser, 2002; Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste, 2009). Empirically, one study looking at intimate relationships indeed showed that partners whose needs are less satisfied generally experience more negative and less positive feelings (Patrick et al., 2007). These associations have also been demonstrated for general need satisfaction (e.g., Reis, Sheldon, Gable,

Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Research on competence and relatedness needs outside the context of intimate relationships found that greater satisfaction of these needs was related to less anger, sadness, and, for competence needs at least, fear (Tong et al., 2009).

Although research on the negative feelings accompanying frustrated relational needs is lacking, the literature cited above puts forward sadness, fear, and anger as the most relevant issues in this context. In the general literature on emotions, these feelings have also been the most frequently investigated types of negative feelings (Nesse, 1990). In addition, these feelings are also found to be the most distinguishable from one another (Fontaine, Veirman, Groenvynck, & Scherer, 2013).

The focus on sadness, fear and anger also corresponds with the theory behind EFT-Cs mentioned above, in which partners are assumed to react in predictable emotional ways when their relational needs are not met. More specifically, feelings such as sadness, fear, and anger arise from threats to attachment needs, whereas fear, anger, contempt, and shame are assumed to result from struggles with identity needs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004).

Negative Feelings and Demanding/Withdrawing Behavior

The association between partners' negative feelings and their conflict behavior has been an important topic of investigation in the couple research literature (e.g., Gottman, 1994a,b, 2011; Verhofstadt et al., 2005a). Dividing negative feelings into hard (i.e., anger or irritation) and soft (i.e., sadness or hurt) feelings, Sanford (2007) found that experiencing hard feelings was related to more negative communication (i.e., criticism and defensiveness). On the other hand, experiencing soft feelings was positively linked to negative communication in a far less consistent way. Regarding demanding/withdrawing behavior in particular, studies on depression (which can be considered as a composite of

sadness, fear, and anger) have demonstrated that partners who are depressed use more demanding and more withdrawing behavior (Du Rocher Schudlich, Papp, & Cummings, 2004).

In EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), negative feelings, in particular anger, are also seen as salient precursors of demanding behavior. Within these approaches, partners' demanding behavior is viewed as part of a reaction in protest to separation, in which they aim to increase the other partner's availability and responsiveness (Bowlby, 1969).

The Present Study

Despite the theoretical and clinical case for the role of need frustration in engendering negative feelings and demanding/withdrawing behavior in couples, much less is known about it empirically. The available evidence for these arguments can be described as largely indirect and there simply is no rigorous and simultaneous examination of the association between need frustration and demanding/withdrawing behavior, or the accompanying feelings in couples' conflict interactions (Vanhee et al., 2016b). Therefore, our objective was to test the following predictions: Partners who report higher levels of interaction-based need frustration (autonomy, competence, relatedness) would engage in higher levels of demanding/withdrawing behavior, as observed during conflict interactions (H1). We also expected that higher levels of interaction-based need frustration (autonomy, competence, relatedness) in partners would be associated with higher levels of self-reported sadness, fear, and anger (H2). Partners who report higher levels of sadness, fear, and anger during conflict interactions would engage in higher levels of demanding/withdrawing behavior during their interactions (H3). Finally, we explored whether partners' interaction-based levels of sadness, fear, and anger mediate the

association between interaction-based need frustration and demanding/withdrawing behavior in the context of couples' observed conflict interactions, following the theories that underpin EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004) (RQ1).

METHOD

Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium. All participants gave their informed written consent.

Participants

The sample consisted of 282 members of 141 Belgian cohabiting/married couples. The recruitment strategy was twofold. First, a campaign was spread via posters in public places and via social media recruiting couples that were willing to participate in a research project on intimate relationships. Second, a team of research assistants recruited further participants by means of a network-sampling technique. The couples that expressed interest in the study were informed further about the project and evaluated for their eligibility to participate. The inclusion criteria specified that couples had to be heterosexual and have been involved in a relationship together for at least one year, and to have been living together for at least six months.

On average, men and women were 37.30 (*SD* = 14.16, range: 19-76) and 35.38 (*SD* = 13.70, range: 19-71) years old, respectively. Fifty-four percent of the men and 60% of the

women had some level of higher education. The average length of couples' relationships was 12.91 years (*SD* = 11.99, range: 1-47). Half of the couples had children (51.1%).

Procedure

After providing their informed consent, partners of each couple were asked to independently complete an internet-based survey at home. Afterwards they were contacted to schedule an appointment for the observational part of the study. For this, couples participated in an 11-minute videotaped conflict interaction task in the laboratory, followed by a video-review task. At the end, both partners were fully debriefed and compensated with 10 euros for completing the questionnaire session and an additional 10 euros for participating in the observational part of the study.

The conflict interaction task. We used a conflict interaction task similar to the task used in previous observational studies of marital conflict (e.g., Verhofstadt et al., 2005a). The laboratory was decorated as a living room and was equipped to film couples' conflict interactions. Prior to the observational task, couples were asked to provide written informed consent to be filmed. Both partners were then separately asked to choose a salient relationship problem, in which they had a desire for change, from a list of common topics of conflict in intimate relationships. Depending on the experimental condition to which each couple was randomly assigned (man or woman as conflict initiator), couples were asked to discuss either the man's or the woman's topic for 11 minutes. Both partners were instructed to discuss the problem as much as they would do at home when experiencing a similar problem.

The video-review procedure. Immediately after the conflict interaction task, both partners separately completed a video-review task (e.g., Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, De Clercq, & Peene, 2005b). Partners viewed the video of their interaction on a laptop and

were asked to re-experience this interaction. Every minute and a half, the video was automatically paused, which resulted in a total of seven stop points. Partners were instructed to answer several questions about what they felt and thought at that specific point in time, submitting their answers on a laptop. Participants had the option to re-observe the last ten seconds before the pause if they felt this would help them to answer the questions.

Measures

Global need frustration. Participants' global level of relational need frustration was assessed by three subscales of the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS; Chen et al., 2015) adapted for use within intimate relationships. The 12 items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (completely untrue) to 5 (completely true). Each subscale consists of four items and measures respondents' frustration of their (1) need for autonomy (e.g., "In the relationship with my partner, I feel forced to do many things I wouldn't choose to do"), (2) need for competence (e.g., "In the relationship with my partner, I feel insecure about my abilities"), and (3) need for relatedness (e.g., "In the relationship with my partner, I feel that s/he is distant towards me"). Participants' subscales scores were computed by averaging the responses for all items included in the specific subscale, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of need frustration. In the current study, the internal consistencies (calculated by means of the Chronbach's alpha) for the frustration of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were .75, .75, and .71, respectively, for men, and .70, .75, and .74, respectively, for women.

Interaction-based need frustration. At the second and fifth pause in the video review task, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they—at that specific

point in the interaction—experienced frustration of their need for (1) autonomy ("At this moment, I was experiencing a lack of freedom of choice"), (2) competence ("At this moment, I was experiencing a lack of appreciation for my competencies"), and (3) relatedness ("At this moment, I was experiencing a lack of relatedness") on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (completely untrue) to 7 (completely true). Based on the SDT literature, each of the three items was complemented with examples of frustration of the particular need. An index of interaction-based need frustration was then computed by averaging each partner's scores across the two pause points, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of need frustration. The Cronbach's alpha scores for frustration of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were .70, .76, and .77, respectively, for men, and .71, .80, and .83, respectively, for women.

Interaction-based feelings. Interaction-based feelings were assessed at the second and fifth pauses by means of three 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = completely untrue, 7 = completely true) on which participants indicated the extent to which they felt (1) sad, (2) fearful, and (3) angry. The scores were then averaged across the two pause points to obtain the situation-specific level of a particular feeling, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of that feeling. Good internal consistencies (using Chronbach's alpha) were obtained for sadness (α = .79 for men, α = .78 for women), fear (α = .72 for men, α = .78 for women), and anger (α = .65 for men, α = .77 for women).

Analysis of observed demanding and withdrawing behavior. The behavioral data were analyzed with the Couples Interaction Rating System (CIRS; Heavey, Gill, & Christensen, 1998), a rating system developed to analyze an individual's behavior during an interaction with his or her partner about a problem. Although the observed behaviors were rated on 13 dimensions, we only used the following dimensions in the current study: (1) blame (i.e., accusations, criticism and assignment of the partner as the causal agent for the

problem), (2) pressures for change (i.e., positive/negative and implicit/explicit pressure for change in the partner), (3) avoidance (i.e., active behavior to avoid engaging in the discussion), (4) withdrawal (i.e., non-verbal passive behavior indicating a lack of interest/energy to discuss the topic), and (5) discussion (i.e., engagement and involvement in discussion). The dimensions were rated on a 9-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (= none) to 9 (= a lot). The subscale demanding behavior was computed by averaging the scores on the dimensions blame and pressures for change. The subscale withdrawing behavior was computed by averaging the scores on the dimensions avoidance, withdrawal, and the inverse of the discussion score. The Cronbach's alphas for demanding behavior and withdrawing behavior were .72 and .77, respectively, for men and .83 and .63, respectively, for women.

Five observers participated in a rater training in which they practiced by rating pilot tapes. They then compared their scoring and discussed their rating issues with each other. The raters were kept "blind" with respect to all the variables, including who was the initiator of each conflict. The trained observers viewed the entire interaction before rating it and then separately rated the behavior of the man and the woman in each interaction. Each of the videos was rated by three observers. Acceptable interrater reliabilities were achieved for both scale scores: demanding behavior (ICC_{Men} = .75; ICC_{Women} = .78) and withdrawing behavior (ICC_{Men} = .67; ICC_{Women} = .62). Therefore, the average rating of each partner's behavior across the three observers was used in the analyses reported below.

Data Analysis Strategy

To address the research hypotheses and question, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. As it was thought that it might be likely that global need frustration affects the extent to which one experiences need frustration in a specific

situation, global need frustration served as a control variable in the regression analyses with interaction-based need frustrations as predictors (H1, H2, and RQ1). Given its association with demanding/withdrawing behavior (Verhofstadt et al., 2005a), conflict initiator was also considered as a control variable in the regressions, with demanding and withdrawing behavior as dependent variables (H1, H3, and RQ1). Because all the study variables were positively skewed, we took the logarithm to base 10 of the scores to approach normality in the data. To investigate multicollinearity, variance inflation factors (VIF) were computed prior to each regression analysis. The VIFs ranged between 1.00 and 1.85 (<10), indicating no multicollinearity (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Separate hierarchical regressions were carried out for men and women. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 23.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the variables of the study. For global and interaction-based need frustration, no significant gender differences were found except for interaction-based autonomy. That is, men reported experiencing more autonomy frustration during conflict interactions than women ($p < .05$). Furthermore, higher levels of interaction-based sadness were found in women, as compared to men ($p < .001$). Finally, regarding observed behavior during conflict, women engaged in higher levels of demanding behavior ($p < .001$), whereas men engaged in higher levels of withdrawing behavior ($p < .01$). Correlations are presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

	Men (*n* = 141)		Women (*n* = 141)		*t*	Possible range
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Global autonomy frustration	1.92	0.72	1.85	0.69	1.02	1-5
Global competence frustration	1.77	0.70	1.79	0.75	-0.30	1-5
Global relatedness frustration	1.40	0.53	1.34	0.52	1.06	1-5
I-b autonomy frustration	2.40	1.37	2.12	1.33	2.32*	1-7
I-b competence frustration	1.88	1.28	1.77	1.26	0.75	1-7
I-b relatedness frustration	1.96	1.25	1.97	1.42	-0.07	1-7
Sadness	1.74	1.16	2.30	1.60	-4.07***	1-7
Fear	1.57	0.95	1.72	1.28	-1.23	1-7
Anger	1.62	1.01	1.80	1.30	-1.45	1-7
Demanding behavior	2.67	1.39	3.29	1.77	-3.87***	1-9
Withdrawing behavior	2.37	1.02	2.02	0.78	3.43**	1-9

Note. I-b = Interaction-based.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Relational Need Frustration and Demanding/Withdrawing Behavior (H1)

In order to test the first hypothesis, separate hierarchical regressions were conducted for demanding behavior and withdrawing behavior as dependent variables. To control for possible effects, conflict initiator and global need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were entered in the first step. During the second step,

Table 2

Correlations between the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Global autonomy frustration	.24**	.47**	.40**	.07	.16	.16	.20*	.33**	.34**	.20*	.18*
2. Global competence frustration	.51**	.12	.39**	.13	.21*	.17*	.16	.32**	.25**	.25**	.19*
3. Global relatedness frustration	.53**	.58**	.26**	.20*	.28**	.36**	.34**	.27**	.34**	.16	.17*
4. I-b autonomy frustration	31**	.19*	.11	.35**	.50**	.59**	.42**	.25**	.40**	.38**	.25**
5. I-b competence frustration	.09	.11	.21*	.44**	.17*	.50**	.31**	.22**	.39**	.27**	.16
6. I-b relatedness frustration	.24**	.19*	.21*	52**	.52**	.21*	.41**	.23**	.35**	.39**	.22**
7. Sadness	.11	.19*	.12	.33**	.33**	.48**	.32**	.54**	.57**	.23**	.05
8. Fear	.03	.09	.07	.19*	.27**	.36**	.51**	.18*	.49**	.03	.09
9. Anger	.18*	.17*	.16	.41**	.39**	.41**	.54**	.48**	.20*	.42**	.16
10. Demanding behavior	.09	.07	.24**	.13	.28**	.26**	.08	-.01	.21*	.27**	.07
11. Withdrawing behavior	.19*	.15	.17*	.09	.19*	.14	.04	.06	.23**	.06	.22**

Note. Correlations for women are presented above the diagonal; correlations for men are presented below the diagonal. Correlations between men and women are presented on the diagonal. I-b = Interaction-based.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

participants' interaction-based frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were entered.

When predicting demanding behavior, the control variables accounted for 11% and 18% of the variance for men and women, respectively, and made a significant contribution to the model, F_{change} (4, 135) = 4.16, $p < .01$ for men, F_{change} (4, 135) = 7.57, $p < .001$ for women (see Table 3). For both men and women, having been the conflict initiator contributed significantly to the model, with the partner who initiated the conflict found to be more demanding during the conflict than the other partner, $\beta = .22$, $p < .05$ for men and $\beta = .35$, $p < .001$ for women. Global relatedness frustration was also significantly and positively associated with demanding behavior, but only for men, $\beta = .35$, $p < .01$. Entering interaction-based need frustration in the second step of the model accounted for an additional significant contribution of 8% of the variance in demanding behavior for men, F_{change} (3, 132) = 4.07, $p < .01$, and 15% for women, F_{change} (3, 132) = 9.68, $p < .001$. However, significant associations were only found on the univariate level for women: interaction-based autonomy and relatedness frustration were significantly associated with demanding behavior, with higher levels of autonomy, $\beta = .22$, $p < .05$, and relatedness frustration, $\beta = .25$, $p < .05$, corresponding to higher levels of demanding behavior during conflict. Overall, the model was found to be significant for both men, F (7,132) = 4.28, $p < .001$, and women, F (7,132) = 9.31, $p < .001$, and accounted for 19% and 33%, respectively, of the variance in demanding behavior.

In the prediction of withdrawing behavior, entering the control variables in the first step explained 16% of the variance for men and 9% of the variance for women, and made a significant contribution to the model, F_{change} (4, 135) = 6.54, $p < .001$ for men, and F_{change} (4, 135) = 3.36, $p < .05$ for women (see Table 3). For both men and women, having been the conflict initiator was negatively associated with withdrawing behavior, indicating that the

partner who initiates the conflict would withdraw less than the partner who is not in the initiator role, β = -.34, p < .001 for men, and β = -.19, p < .05 for women. Adding the interaction-based need frustration in the second step did not significantly increase the R^2 for men, whereas for women it accounted for a significant amount of additional variance, 5%, F_{change} (3, 132) = 2.80, p < .05. However, no specific type of need frustration was found to be a significant predictor of withdrawing behavior. Overall, the model accounted for a significant 19% and 15% of the variance in withdrawing behavior for men, F (7,132) = 4.39, p < .001, and women, F (7,132) = 3.20, p < .01, respectively.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Demanding/Withdrawing Behavior

		Men			Women		
Predicting demanding behavior							
Step	Predictor	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
1			.11	4.16**		.18	7.57***
	Conflict initiator	.22*			.35***		
	Global autonomy frustration	-.02			.14		
	Global competence frustration	-.12			.09		
	Global relatedness frustration	.35**			.11		
2			.08	4.07**		.15	9.68***
	I-b autonomy frustration	.02			.22*		
	I-b competence frustration	.19			-.02		
	I-b relatedness frustration	.12			.25*		
		R^2 total = .19, $F(7,132) = 4.28$***			R^2 total = .33, $F(7,132) = 9.31$***		
Predicting withdrawing behavior							
Step	Predictor	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
1			.16	6.54***		.09	3.36*
	Conflict initiator	-.34***			-.19*		
	Global autonomy frustration	.09			.06		
	Global competence frustration	.08			.17		
	Global relatedness frustration	.03			.06		
2			.03	1.45		.05	2.80*
	I-b autonomy frustration	-.11			.20		
	I-b competence frustration	.16			.01		
	I-b relatedness frustration	.07			.06		
		R^2 total = .19, $F(7,132) = 4.39$***			R^2 total = .15, $F(7,132) = 3.20$**		

Note. I-b = Interaction-based.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Relational Need Frustration and Sadness, Fear, and Anger (H2)

To assess the association between frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness on the one hand and sadness, fear, and anger during conflict on the other, separate hierarchical regressions were conducted for each feeling. Global need (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) frustration was entered in the first step and participants' interaction-based need frustration was entered in the second step.

When predicting sadness, entering global need frustration in the first step only explained a significant amount of variance for women, 12%, F_{change} (3,137) = 6.21, $p < .01$ (see Table 4). Global relatedness frustration significantly contributed to the model, with higher levels of relatedness frustration in general corresponding with higher levels of sadness during conflict, $\beta = .30$, $p < .01$. As predicted, entering the interaction-based need frustration in the second step accounted for an additional proportion of variance of 23% for men, F_{change} (3,134) = 13.60, $p < .001$, and 15% for women, F_{change} (3,134) = 8.80, $p < .001$. For men, only interaction-based relatedness frustration contributed significantly to the model, with higher levels of relatedness frustration found to be associated with higher levels of sadness during conflict, $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$. For women on the other hand, only interaction-based autonomy frustration was significantly positively associated with the experience of sadness during conflict, $\beta = .27$, $p < .01$. Overall, the model accounted for a significant 26% and 27% of the variance in sadness for men, F (6,134) = 7.95, $p < .001$, and women, F (6,134) = 8.03, $p < .001$, respectively.

In the prediction of fear, entering the control variables in the first step only made a significant contribution to the model for women, F_{change} (3,137) = 8.31, $p < .001$, explaining 15% of the variance (see Table 4). More specifically, both higher levels of global autonomy, $\beta = .20$, $p < .05$, and competence frustration, $\beta = .18$, $p < .05$, were found to correspond with higher levels of fear felt during conflict. Adding the interaction-based need frustration in the

second step accounted for a significant additional variance proportion of 13% in men, F_{change} (3, 134) = 6.87, $p < .001$, whereas for women, it did not significantly increase the R^2. Interaction-based relatedness frustration significantly contributed to the model; when men experienced higher levels of relatedness frustration during the conflict, they also experienced higher levels of sadness, $\beta = .31$, $p < .01$. Overall, the model was found to be significant for both men, F (6,134) = 3.66, $p < .01$, and women, F (6,134) = 5.39, $p < .001$, and accounted for 14% and 19%, respectively, of the variance in interaction-based fear.

For the prediction of anger, adding global need frustration in the first step explained a significant amount of variance, but only for women, 17%, F_{change} (3,137) = 9.21, $p < .001$ (see Table 4). Both global autonomy frustration, $\beta = .22$, $p < .05$, and relatedness frustration, $\beta = .24$, $p < .01$, were significantly and positively associated with anger during conflict. Entering interaction-based need frustration in the second step of the model accounted for a significant additional 21% of the variance in anger for men, F_{change} (3, 134) = 12.17, $p < .001$, and 14% for women, F_{change} (3, 134) = 8.89, $p < .001$. For both men and women, interaction-based autonomy and competence frustration made a significant contribution to the model, with higher levels of autonomy frustration, $\beta = .21$, $p < .05$ for men, and $\beta = .25$, $p < .01$ for women, as well as higher levels of competence frustration during the conflict, $\beta = .19$, $p < .05$ for men, and $\beta = .18$, $p < .05$ for women, corresponding to higher levels of anger during the conflict. Overall, the model accounted for a significant 25% and 31% of the variance in anger for men, F (6,134) = 7.36, $p < .001$, and women, F (6,134) = 9.84, $p < .001$, respectively.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Sadness, Fear, and Anger

		Men			Women		
Predicting sadness							
Step	Predictor	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
1			.04	1.81		.12	6.21**
	Global autonomy frustration	.01			.08		
	Global competence frustration	.18			.01		
	Global relatedness frustration	.01			.30**		
2			.23	13.60***		.15	8.80***
	I-b autonomy frustration	.09			.27**		
	I-b competence frustration	.08			.03		
	I-b relatedness frustration	.39***			.15		
		R^2 total = .26, $F(6,134) = 7.95$***			R^2 total = .27, $F(6,134) = 8.03$***		
Predicting fear							
Step	Predictor	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
1			.01	.40		.15	8.31***
	Global autonomy frustration	-.03			.20*		
	Global competence frustration	.07			.18*		
	Global relatedness frustration	.05			.12		
2			.13	6.87***		.04	2.25
	I-b autonomy frustration	-.01			.17		
	I-b competence frustration	.11			.04		
	I-b relatedness frustration	.31**			.02		
		R^2 total = .14, $F(6, 134) = 3.66$**			R^2 total = .19, $F(6,134) = 5.39$***		

Table 4. *Continued*

Predicting anger		Men			Women		
Step	Predictor	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
1			.04	2.05		.17	9.21***
	Global autonomy frustration	.11			.22*		
	Global competence frustration	.08			.05		
	Global relatedness frustration	.05			.24**		
2			.21	12.17***		.14	8.89***
	I-b autonomy frustration	.21*			.25**		
	I-b competence frustration	.19*			.18*		
	I-b relatedness frustration	.18			.02		
		R^2 total = .25, $F(6,134) = 7.36$***			R^2 total = .31, $F(6,134) = 9.84$***		

Note. I-b = Interaction-based.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Sadness, Fear, and Anger and Demanding/Withdrawing Behavior (H3)

Two hierarchical multiple regressions were carried out to test the association between interaction-based sadness, fear, and anger on the one hand and demanding/withdrawing behavior during conflict on the other. Conflict initiator was entered in the first step as the control variable and the three interaction-based feelings were added in the second step.

When predicting demanding behavior, the control variable conflict initiator explained 3% and 11% of the variance for men and women, respectively, and made a significant positive contribution to the model, F_{change} (1,138) = 4.24, $p < .05$ for men, and F_{change} (1,138) = 17.69, $p < .001$ for women (see Table 5). As predicted, entering interaction-

based feelings in the second step of the model accounted for an additional 6% of the variance in demanding behavior for men, F_{change} (3, 135) = 2.96, $p < .05$, and 21% for women, F_{change} (3, 135) = 14.11, $p < .001$. For men, only anger contributed significantly to the model with higher levels of anger found to be associated with higher levels of demanding behavior, $\beta = .28$, $p < .01$. For women, both interaction-based fear and anger made a significant contribution to the model, with lower levels of fear, $\beta = -.28$, $p < .01$, as well as higher levels of anger, $\beta = .46$, $p < .001$, corresponding to higher levels of demanding behavior during conflict. Overall, the model was found to be significant for both men, F (4,135) = 3.33, $p < .05$, and women, F (4,135) = 16.26, $p < .001$, and accounted for 9% and 33%, respectively, of the variance in demanding behavior.

When predicting withdrawing behavior, the control variable conflict initiator accounted for 13% and 3% of the variance in men and women, respectively, and made a significant negative contribution to the model, F_{change} (1,138) = 21.19, $p < .001$ for men, and F_{change} (1,138) = 4.83, $p < .05$ for women (see Table 5). For men, adding the interaction-based feelings in the second step explained an additional 6% of the variance, F_{change} (3, 135) = 3.38, $p < .05$. Anger during conflict significantly contributed to the model with higher levels of anger found to be associated with engaging in higher levels of withdrawing behavior during conflict, $\beta = .29$, $p < .01$. Although entering the variables in the second step did not significantly increase the R^2 for women, anger was also significantly and positively associated with withdrawing behavior, $\beta = .21$, $p < .05$. Overall, the model was found to be significant for both men, F (4,135) = 8.11, $p < .001$, and women, F (4,135) = 2.60, $p < .05$, and explained 19% and 7%, respectively, of the variance in withdrawing behavior.

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Demanding and Withdrawing Behavior

		Men			Women		
Predicting demanding behavior							
Step	Predictor	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
1			.03	4.24*		.11	17.69***
	Conflict initiator	.17*			.34***		
2			.06	2.96*		.21	14.11***
	Sadness	-.01			.14		
	Fear	-.15			-.28**		
	Anger	.28**			.46***		
		R^2 total = .09, $F(4,135) = 3.33$*			R^2 total = .33, $F(4,135) = 16.26$***		
Predicting withdrawing behavior							
Step	Predictor	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
1			.13	21.19***		.03	4.83*
	Conflict initiator	-.37***			-.18*		
2			.06	3.38*		.04	1.83
	Sadness	-.11			-.11		
	Fear	-.01			.06		
	Anger	.29**			.21*		
		R^2 total = .19, $F(4,135) = 8.11$***			R^2 total = .07, $F(4,135) = 2.60$*		

Note.* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

The Mediating Roles of Sadness, Fear, and Anger (RQ1)

To assess the mediating role of interaction-based sadness, fear, and anger in the association between interaction-based need frustration and demanding/withdrawing behavior, we relied on the four criteria for mediation stipulated by Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998): (a) The predictor (i.e., frustration of autonomy, competence, or relatedness) significantly predicts the outcome (i.e., demanding/withdrawing behavior), (b) the predictor significantly predicts the mediator (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger), (c) the mediator predicts the outcome after controlling for the predictor, and (d) after controlling for the mediator, the association between the predictor and the outcome is reduced (partial mediation) or no longer significant (full mediation). In order to address the shortcomings of this method, we also examined the mediation effect more directly by means of the Sobel test (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002; Sobel, 1982). This test investigates whether the indirect effect of the predictor on the outcome via the mediator is significantly different from zero.

As the first and second criteria are identical to our first and second hypothesis, we relied on the hierarchical regression analyses described above. Results showed that only demanding behavior in women was significantly predicted by interaction-based need frustration, more specifically by autonomy, β = .22, p < .05, and relatedness frustration, β = .25, p < .05 (see Table 2). Regarding these specific associations, the second criterion was only fulfilled for interaction-based autonomy frustration, which significantly predicted sadness, β = .27, p < .01, and anger, β = .25, p < .01, in women (see Table 4). Therefore, further analyses only investigated the mediating role of interaction-based sadness and anger in the association between autonomy frustration and demanding behavior in women during conflict.

To address the third and fourth criteria, two multiple hierarchical regressions were conducted, one for sadness and one for anger. In each regression analysis, conflict initiator, global need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), and interaction-based competence and relatedness frustration were entered in the first step to control for their possible effects. In the second step, participants' interaction-based autonomy frustration and interaction-based sadness or anger were added.

After controlling for interaction-based autonomy frustration, sadness appeared to not be a significant predictor of demanding behavior in women, β = .04, p = .63, whereas anger significantly predicted demanding behavior in women, β = .25, p < .01 (see Table 6). For the latter, also the fourth criterion was met, as the association between autonomy frustration and demanding behavior was both reduced and no longer significant after controlling for anger, β = .16, p = .09. The Sobel test revealed that the magnitude of the reduction of the beta coefficient was significant, Sobel z = 2.01, p < .05. These findings support full mediation, with higher levels of autonomy frustration associated with higher levels of demanding behavior via higher levels of anger in women (see Figure 1).

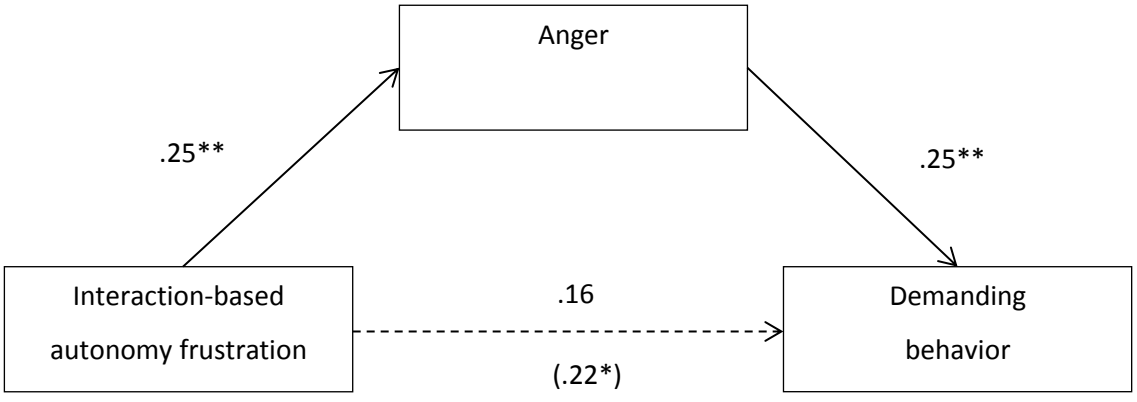

Figure 1. Interaction-based anger as a mediator of interaction-based autonomy frustration and demanding behavior in women.

* p < .05 ** p < .01.

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Investigating the Third and Fourth Criteria of Mediation by Sadness or Anger of Autonomy Frustration and Demanding Behavior in Women

		Mediating role of sadness			Mediating role of anger		
Step	Predictor	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
1			.30	9.61***		.30	9.61***
	Conflict initiator	.34***			.34***		
	Global autonomy frustration	.13			.13		
	Global competence frustration	.08			.08		
	Global relatedness frustration	-.02			-.02		
	I-b competence frustration	.04			.04		
	I-b relatedness frustration	.35***			.35***		
2			.03	2.88		.07	7.57**
	I-b autonomy frustration	.21*			.16		
	Sadness (regression 1)	.04			/		
	or anger (regression 2)	/			.25**		
		R^2 total = .33, $F(8,131) = 8.13$***			R^2 total = .38, $F(8,131) = 9.81$***		

Note. I-b = Interaction-based.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

There were two main aims of the current study. First, we sought to investigate how partners behave when their needs are frustrated during actual conflict interactions. Second, in order to obtain a more detailed picture of this link, we examined the role of negative feelings in this association.

Summary of Results

Relational need frustration and demanding/withdrawing behavior. Our first prediction was that higher levels of interaction-based need frustration would be associated with higher levels of demanding/withdrawing behavior observed during conflict interactions. At the multivariate level, this hypothesis was fully confirmed for women and partially confirmed for men. At the univariate level for women, when their autonomy and relatedness needs were frustrated, they tended to engage in higher levels of demanding behavior during conflict. In other words, it is suggested that when women feel frustrated about their relational needs, and, more specifically, about their psychological freedom (i.e., autonomy frustration) or closeness to their partner (i.e., relatedness frustration), they will blame their partner and pressure him for change. These findings confirm and extend the theoretical basis of EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004) and the findings of Vanhee et al. (2016b), in which a significant association between relatedness frustration and self-reported demanding behavior was found in women. For men, although on the multivariate level, frustration of the three needs together did significantly contribute to the emergence of demanding behavior, we did not find any significant association between the specific types of need frustration and demanding behavior. This contradicts the study of Vanhee et al. (2016b), in which competence frustration in men was found to relate to self-reported demanding behavior.

Regarding withdrawing behavior, a significant multivariate effect of relational need frustration was only found for women, indicating that when all three types of needs were frustrated at the same time during conflict, they correlated with withdrawing behavior. No significant univariate association was found between specific types of need frustration and observed withdrawing behavior for either gender. These results contradict previous findings from self-reports of higher levels of relatedness frustration (in men and women) and

autonomy frustration (in men) accompanying higher levels of withdrawing behavior (Vanhee et al., 2016b).

Relational need frustration and negative feelings. As predicted in the second hypothesis, we found that higher levels of interaction-based need frustration were associated with experiencing higher levels of negative feelings during conflict. More specifically, it was found that depending on what type of feeling was examined, each specific type of need seemed to play a different role. For sadness and fear, relatedness frustration appeared to be the only significant correlate in men, whereas for women, sadness was predicted by autonomy frustration while no specific type of need frustration was related to experiencing interaction-based fear in women. For anger, the results were comparable for men and women, with higher levels of interaction-based autonomy and competence frustration found to be associated with higher levels of anger during conflict.

These results are in line with theoretical assumptions that negative feelings serve as alarms for both partners (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Keltner & Haidt, 1999) or as consequences of maladaptive coping mechanisms if needs are frustrated (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Furthermore, they coincide with the SDT literature on the association between need dissatisfaction and negative feelings in general (Patrick et al., 2007; Reis et al., 2000) and extend this body of research by investigating specific types of negative feelings.

Negative feelings and demanding/withdrawing behavior. Our third hypothesis, in which we predicted that higher levels of interaction-based negative feelings would be related to the observation of higher levels of demanding/withdrawing behavior during conflict interactions, was fully confirmed for anger. When partners (both men and women) experienced more anger, they engaged in higher levels of demanding/withdrawing behavior during conflict. Regarding demanding behavior, these findings are in line with EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), in which demanding behavior is seen as

especially likely to result from anger. The results also correspond with Sanford's (2007) findings that hard feelings are positively associated with more criticism of and defensiveness towards a partner. Our results further support the prevailing stance in the literature on feelings, which associates anger with antagonistic tendencies such as moving against or attacking the other person in order to induce change (Roseman, 2011; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994) and protect oneself from the other, who is seen as the source of harm (Smith & Lazarus, 1990).

What about the association between anger and withdrawal found in our study? As well as being a precursor of demanding behavior, anger might also be the consequence of not accomplishing the desired change through criticism and complaining, resulting in a cascade of contempt, defensiveness, and withdrawal (Gottman, 1994a).

For interaction-based sadness and fear, no significant association was found with demanding nor with withdrawing behavior during conflict, with the exception of a negative fear-demand association in women. As already demonstrated by Sanford (2007), soft feelings might not be associated with destructive behaviors, like demanding or withdrawing behavior because it has been suggested that these feelings are more focused on preserving and repairing the relationship. This negative association with demanding behavior could be explained by findings from previous research suggesting that fear is associated with tendencies to avoid danger (Roseman, 2011).

Mediating role of negative feelings. In the first research question, we explored the role of interaction-based negative feelings in the association between interaction-based need frustration and demanding/withdrawing behavior during conflict. Our data indicated a fully mediating role for anger in the association between autonomy frustration and demanding behavior during conflict interactions for women. This finding suggests that when women feel frustrated about their autonomy needs, and therefore personally hurt (i.e., it

has affected their identity dimension; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008), they experience more self-protection feelings, such as anger (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Anger in turn is associated with attacking the other by blaming, criticizing, and pressuring the partner for change (Roseman, 2011; Roseman et al., 1994).

Null findings. Although some interesting results were found, it should also be noted that some of our predictions were not confirmed. First, it is apparent that interaction-based autonomy, competence, and relatedness frustration were less robust correlates of observed conflict behavior than could be expected from previous survey studies (Vanhee et al., 2016b). Although the three needs together significantly contributed to the prediction of observed demanding/withdrawing behavior (except for withdrawing behavior in men), significant associations were only found at the univariate level in the prediction of demanding behavior, and this only in women. One possible explanation is that the design of our study, with rather low levels of interaction-based need frustration, did not allow us to detect as many associations between specific types of need frustration and demanding/withdrawing behavior as predicted. However, this methodological explanation contradicts with the demonstrated associations between specific types of need frustration and demanding behavior in women. Another possible conceptual explanation for our null findings on need frustration and withdrawal (i.e., at the multivariate/univariate level in men, and at the univariate level in women) is that the latter is often seen as the last stage of a cascade that runs from criticizing, to contempt, and defensiveness (Gottman, 1994a). As such, need frustration might only be related to withdrawal during conflict when relational needs are frustrated to a significant degree or for a significant period of time. In our sample, the level of interaction-based need frustration was rather low and our research design focused on a limited time framework, which made it impossible to observe the detrimental associations of high levels of need frustration with conflict behavior in the long-term.

Second, although previous studies have suggested that the need for relatedness matters most in intimate relationships (Vanhee et al., 2016b, c), our results did not indicate that this was the most central correlate of negative feelings and behavior during observed conflict interactions. Each of the needs included in our analysis appeared to play a relevant but different role, depending on the particular outcome. One possible explanation for the less cardinal role of relatedness needs in our observational study, as compared to previously published survey research, involves the nature of the outcomes under study. In previous studies relational outcomes were focused upon, for example relationship satisfaction (Vanhee et al., 2016c), whereas in the current study, we also investigated individual outcomes, such as partners' individual behavior and feelings. For negative feelings in general, it was already shown that fulfillment of each need predicts negative feelings uniquely but more or less to the same extent (Patrick et al., 2007).

Gender. At the descriptive level, some gender differences were found. Those regarding conflict behavior are interesting as they showed that women engage in higher levels of demanding behavior, whereas for withdrawing behavior the opposite was found. Furthermore, during the interactions, men were found to experience significantly higher levels of autonomy frustration, compared to women. Women on the other hand, reported higher levels of interaction-based sadness than men.

Regarding the associations between the studied variables, we noticed both similarities and differences between men and women, as described above. The most striking similarity between men and women concerned the pattern of findings showing that higher levels of interaction-based autonomy and competence frustration were accompanied by higher levels of anger, which were then associated with higher levels of observed demanding as well as withdrawing behavior during conflict.

Conclusion. Taken together, these findings led us to a first conclusion that relational need frustration, as experienced during conflict, appeared to have value in explaining partners' experience of negative feelings and certain destructive types of observed conflict behavior.

However, there seem to be different roles played by relatedness, autonomy, and competence frustration, depending on what type of feeling and conflict behavior was examined. Relatedness frustration (in men) was associated with sadness and fear, whereas frustration of autonomy and competence was related to experiences of anger. These results suggest that relatedness frustration in men, which represents the need that is most focused on relationship values, appeared to be associated with more soft feelings (such as sadness and fear), which are associated with relationship oriented goals and in which the experience or expression of vulnerability is central (Sanford, 2007). On the other hand, frustration of needs that interfere with one's identity dimension (i.e., acceptance of who one is; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008), for instance by feeling controlled (i.e., autonomy frustration) or by feeling inferior and unsuccessful (i.e., competence frustration) in one's relationship, might be especially related to hard feelings, such as anger, which are focused on the self and on protecting oneself from harmful situations (Sanford, 2007). For conflict behavior, our findings showed that partners' level of autonomy, relatedness, and competence frustration, as a whole, showed a link with higher levels of demanding behavior (in both men and women) and higher levels of withdrawing behavior (in women). Only autonomy and competence frustration were uniquely associated with demanding behavior (in women).

Second, each specific feeling was also found to play a different role in predicting demanding/withdrawing behavior, with anger playing the most cardinal role. More specifically, angry feelings were particularly related to destructive behaviors of demanding

and withdrawing during conflict. Because of their detrimental associations with conflict behavior, couple therapists should be cautious of these feelings. When anger is detected in partners, it is important to temper these feelings and to convert them into more constructive feelings. This reprocessing of emotional experiences is also one of the key principles of EFT-C therapies (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004).

Finally, our results suggest that negative feelings such as sadness, fear, and anger signal to a person or their partner that relational needs are being frustrated (Carver & Scheier, 1990). Therefore, feelings are a source of information for couple therapists, which is important to explore and address in couple therapy.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this study is that it is the first to explore the role of feelings in the association between relational need frustration and destructive conflict behaviors in couples, giving us a more detailed picture. Furthermore, by investigating this link using an observational design, we were able to include observational measures of demanding/withdrawing behavior, giving us a more objective view of conflict interactions. Additionally, a micro-analytic view of partners' experiences in the moment was obtained by the inclusion of interaction-based measures of need frustration and negative feelings.

Despite the strengths of this study, some limitations should be noted. For example, we used a sample of middle-class, heterosexual, non-clinical couples, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results. Future research should attempt to replicate these findings with more heterogeneous samples. For example, it will be valuable to examine these issues within couples who are experiencing higher levels of need frustration. Furthermore, in order to save time, only two pause points were used to assess interaction-based need frustration and feelings when our participants were reviewing their videos. Although these

two pauses were during different parts of the interaction and were highly correlated, it is possible that the observed behavior, coded over the whole interaction, was affected by experiences of need frustration or feelings that were not captured at these two points. It would be valuable to replicate these findings with more pauses to capture the full interaction, or with a more narrow time window in which the impact of need frustration and feelings on behavior, measured perhaps on a single time point immediately following these experiences, could be assessed. Furthermore, as the associations described are correlational in nature, the temporal order of the processes under investigation could not be tested with the present data. It is possible, for instance, that being more demanding during conflict results in the experience of feeling more angry, which, in turn, leads to being more frustrated about one's autonomy, rather than the other way around. In order to resolve the issue of causal ordering, future research should therefore use longitudinal or experimental designs. Additionally, by focusing only on one's own conflict behavior, cycles of conflict behavior could not be captured. For instance, withdrawal is often conceptualized as a reaction to demanding behavior of a partner and the other way around, resulting in a destructive pattern of demand-withdrawal. Future research should complement the current findings by investigating these cycles and the underlying relational needs and emotional dynamics.

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CHAPTER 6

NEED FRUSTRATION AND TENDENCIES TO DEMAND OR WITHDRAW DURING CONFLICT: THE ROLE OF SADNESS, FEAR, AND ANGER[1]

ABSTRACT

Two studies examined the interrelations in conflict situations between relational need frustration (i.e., frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness), negative feelings (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger), and action tendencies (i.e., demanding and withdrawing). Study 1 used a recall design with a sample of 200 individuals involved in heterosexual relationships. Study 2 used an imagination design with a sample of 397 individuals involved in heterosexual relationships. Taken together, the results indicate that partners' levels of need frustration are predictive of their action tendencies. Higher levels of frustration of each need (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were associated with more demanding tendencies, and higher levels of autonomy and competence frustration were associated with more withdrawing tendencies. Moreover, the results indicated that the type of need frustration is predictive of the type of feelings that participants experienced.

[1] Based on Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G. M. D., Fontaine, J. R. J., Moors, A., & Verhofstadt, L. L. (2016). *Need frustration and tendencies to demand or withdraw during conflict: The role of sadness, fear, and anger.* [Submitted paper]

Higher levels of competence frustration corresponded with higher levels of the experience of sadness, fear, and anger, and higher levels of relatedness frustration were associated with more sadness and anger. Autonomy frustration was only a predictor of anger. Furthermore, concerning the relation between feelings and action tendencies, we could only demonstrate a positive link between the negative feeling of anger and demanding tendencies, whereas for withdrawing tendencies, fear was found to be a predictor. Our results were similar for men and women. Finally, anger was found to be a mediator in the association between autonomy (women), competence (men and women), and relatedness (men and women) frustration, on the one hand, and demanding tendencies, on the other hand. In women, fear was also a mediator between competence frustration and withdrawing tendencies.

INTRODUCTION

The way in which partners act when dealing with relationship conflict as well as the reason why they do so have been salient topics of investigation for many years now (Eldridge, 2009; Ellison, Kouros, Papp, & Cummings, 2016). Understanding where couple's adaptive but especially maladaptive conflict behavior originates from is important, given its well-documented association with relationship outcomes (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Fincham, 2009).

Recent research has shown that partners' conflict behavior is consistently linked to the extent to which their relational needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are frustrated by their partner. Survey data (Vanhee, Lemmens, Stas, Loeys, & Verhofstadt, 2016b) have shown that higher levels of autonomy and/or relatedness frustration in men and women lead to less constructive conflict behavior. Higher levels of autonomy frustration in men lead to higher mutual avoidance behavior in the couple whereas higher levels of competence frustration in men lead to more demand-withdrawal in the couple. Furthermore, higher levels of relatedness frustration in both men and women lead to more mutual avoidance and more demand-withdrawal in couples. The link between relational need frustration and destructive types of self-reported conflict behavior has been further corroborated by recent observational lab research indicating that higher levels of autonomy or relatedness frustration in women lead them to act in a more demanding way towards their partner (Vanhee, Lemmens, & Verhofstadt, 2016c).

The latter study also examined the role of feelings in the association between need frustration and conflict behavior in couples. From an emotion perspective, all three variables (evaluation of need frustration, feelings, and behavior) can be seen as components of emotions. Indeed, contemporary emotion theories define emotions as episodes in which the evaluation of an event in light of one's needs—for instance,

evaluation of an event as frustrating one's needs—leads to a cascade of changes (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Scherer & Ellsworth, 2009). Changes occur in feelings, action tendencies, somatic responses, expressive behavior and gross behavior. Each of these changes is supposed to have a function. Feelings act as an alarm when an event obstructs a person's needs. Thus, in case of a mismatch between an event and one's needs, feelings inform the individual about the level of need frustration (Carver & Scheier, 1990). Action tendencies and somatic responses serve to prepare and support overt (gross and expressive) behavior aimed at reducing need frustration. Expressive behavior is said to have a communicative function: It signals to one's partner that needs are being frustrated within a relationship (Keltner & Haidt, 1999) and/or the gross behavior that one is ready to engage in (Fridlund, 1997).

Outlining the interplay between frustrated needs, feelings, and partners' conflict behavior is particularly useful from a couple therapy point of view. It may guide therapists to focus on and alter those processes that bear the strongest responsibility for creating and maintaining destructive interaction patterns. With regard to the direction of the interrelationships, Emotionally Focused Couple Therapies (EFT-Cs; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004) assume that need frustration leads to negative feelings, which in their turn lead to specific behaviors oriented towards the partner. The partner then reacts to these behaviors, which results over time in couples' interaction patterns during conflict. However, a recent review of the literature on need frustration, negative feelings, and conflict behavior in couples revealed that there has been little rigorous empirical investigation on this topic (Vanhee, Lemmens, Moors, Hinnekens, & Verhofstadt, 2016a). One exception was the study of Vanhee and colleagues (2016c), which demonstrated that anger experienced during conflict accounts for the association between women's levels of autonomy frustration and their demanding behavior during observed conflict interactions.

Despite promising first steps taken in this field of research, the survey and observational methods used in previous studies have well-known methodological disadvantages. Surveys rely on globally self-reporting by participants. This is a problem as cognitive and motivational biases can interfere with the way participants synthesize the details of past conflict interactions into a description of their general experiences of need frustration and conflict within their relationship (Hinde 1997; Schwarz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998). Observational methods used to study couple conflict in the laboratory instead of in situ, on the other hand, may lack ecological validity. It is possible that partners act differently because of the artificial setting, limiting how applicable the results are to natural settings (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995a). Therefore, it is important to replicate existing findings concerning relational need frustration, feelings, and conflict behavior by using other research methods as well.

To address the shortcomings of both survey and observational designs we conducted two studies: In the first study we made use of a recall design and in the second one, an imagination design with standardized situations was used. Both studies focused on action tendencies rather than on overt behavior as these are assumed to precede overt behavior and are less influenced by regulatory attempts (Carver, 2006). In both studies, we examined the associations between the types of relational needs that can be frustrated (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness), the types of feelings that may be experienced (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger), and the types of action tendencies that are raised (i.e., demanding and withdrawing) in conflict situations. In the following paragraphs, the major concepts of the current research and accompanying research will be discussed in greater detail.

Relational Need Frustration

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) argues that people have three innate psychological needs—the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness—whose fulfillment in the intimate relationship is essential for partners' relational well-being (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). More specifically, various studies have highlighted that higher need satisfaction leads to higher levels of relationship satisfaction and commitment (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012; Vanhee, Lemmens, & Verhofstadt, 2016d), less conflict, and better conflict resolution (Patrick et al., 2007).

SDT advocates have recently argued for the need to treat need satisfaction and need frustration as two independent factors. Need satisfaction involves partners being supportive of each other's needs, with the absence of need satisfaction (i.e., dissatisfaction) referring to a passive way of not satisfying the partner's needs. Need frustration, on the other hand, refers to an active and direct way of undermining the partner's needs. Thus, need frustration implies need dissatisfaction, whereas the opposite is not necessarily true (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Partners experience autonomy satisfaction when they feel they have agency and that they are psychologically free in their relationship, they experience competence satisfaction when they feel they have mastery and the capability to achieve their goals, and they experience relatedness satisfaction when they feel loved and cared for by their partner. By contrast, partners experience autonomy frustration when they feel excessively controlled or pressured to act in a certain way, they experience competence frustration when their partner makes them feel uncertain and unsuccessful, and they experience relatedness frustration when they feel rejected and abandoned by their partner (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

The importance of treating need satisfaction and need frustration as two separate factors has been highlighted by research demonstrating different outcomes for both. Research has shown that need satisfaction is a better predictor for individual (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011) and relational well-being (Vanhee et al., 2016d) than need frustration. Conversely, need frustration has proved to be a more robust predictor of malfunctioning and ill-being (Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Boone, & Mouratidis, 2013) than need satisfaction. Given that this current research focuses on conflict and disagreement in intimate relationships, a need frustration perspective was deemed more appropriate.

Relational Need Frustration and Demanding/Withdrawing Tendencies

Action tendencies prepare and direct people's overt behavior (Scherer, 2005). Two kinds of action tendencies are regarded as the building blocks of behavior: The tendency to approach and that of withdrawing (Carver, 2006). In the field of couple conflict research, approach tendencies are studied via partners' demanding behavior and withdrawing tendencies are studied via partners' withdrawal behavior. Partners are seen as demanding when they accuse, blame, or criticize the other partner in order to elicit change. They are seen as withdrawing when they avoid, refuse, or are unwilling to deal directly with the issue at hand (see Eldridge & Christensen, 2002, for an overview). These behaviors are frequently studied in couple research (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995b; Fincham, 2009), perhaps because they are seen as the most destructive behaviors during couple conflicts (Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999; Eldridge, 2000).

To our knowledge, no research is available on the association between relational need frustration and demanding/withdrawing *tendencies*. We therefore describe studies examining the association between relational need frustration and demanding/withdrawing

behavior. Previous studies have shown that partners who desire change from the other partner, which may include requests that their partner stops frustrating their needs, engage in demanding behavior, such as criticizing, blaming, or accusing the partner, aimed to elicit change (Papp, Kouros, & Cummings, 2009; Verhofstadt, Buysse, De Clercq, & Goodwin, 2005). The association between need frustration and demanding behavior was more directly addressed in two recently conducted studies by Vanhee and colleagues. In a self-report survey study (Vanhee et al., 2016b), it was found that competence frustration in men and relatedness frustration in women are predictors of demanding behavior during conflict. In a previous observational study (Vanhee et al., 2016c), it was shown that women experiencing higher levels of autonomy or relatedness frustration are more likely to engage in more demanding behavior towards their partners.

Gottman (1994) argued that when criticizing and complaining do not achieve the desired effect, partners become involved in a cascade of contempt, defensiveness, and finally emotional withdrawal and refusal to engage in discussions. In line with this, Vanhee et al. (2016b) found in their survey-based study that men's autonomy frustration and both men's and women's relatedness frustration are predictive of being more withdrawing during conflict. In their observational study, however, no significant associations were found between need frustration and withdrawing behavior (Vanhee et al., 2016c).

Relational Need Frustration and Negative Feelings

SDT posits that when people detect threats to their need fulfillment, they typically experience a variety of negative feelings, such as anxiety, sadness, and anger (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT further describes a maladaptive mechanism for coping with need frustration: The pursuing of more extrinsic rather than intrinsic goals (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Because these extrinsic goals interfere with need satisfaction in the long run, there are

associations to be found between these extrinsic goals and anxiety and depression (Kasser, 2002; Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste, 2009). Direct empirical evidence for an association between relational need frustration and partners' negative feelings was found in an observational study by Vanhee and colleagues (2016c). Sadness appears to be predicted by relatedness frustration in men and autonomy frustration in women, whereas fear is only predicted by relatedness frustration in men. For anger, the results are comparable for men and women, with higher levels of autonomy and competence frustration found to be associated with higher levels of anger. Other studies looking at these associations have found similar results, with less need satisfaction leading to more negative feelings (Patrick et al., 2007).

Negative Feelings and Demanding/Withdrawing Tendencies

In the literature on emotions, both sadness and fear are assumed to be associated with distancing or avoiding tendencies, which reduce interaction with the other person (Roseman, 2011) whereas anger is associated with antagonistic tendencies such as moving against or attacking the other person (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 2011; but see Lench, Flores, & Bench, 2011).

Because research on the association between negative feelings and demanding/withdrawing *tendencies* in intimate relationships is currently lacking, we instead looked to studies that examined the association between negative feelings and demanding/withdrawing *behavior*. Studies on depression (which can be considered as a composite of sadness, fear, and anger) have demonstrated that partners who are depressed use both more demanding and more withdrawing behaviors (Du Rocher, Schudlich, Papp, & Cummings, 2004). Furthermore, observational research has shown that when partners experience more anger, they engage in higher levels of demanding/withdrawing behavior

during conflict. Additionally, in women, fear is negatively associated with demanding behavior (Vanhee et al., 2016c).

The Present Research

In order to draw more powerful conclusions about the interrelations between relational need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), feelings (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger), and conflict behavior (i.e., demanding and withdrawing), a multi-method approach was necessary. Therefore, similar associations to those previously described by Vanhee et al. (2016c) were examined with two other designs. The first study used a recall design in which participants had to describe an authentic, self-experienced situation from their recent past where their needs had been frustrated and reported on their need frustration, feelings, and tendencies to demand/withdraw. The second study used an imagination design in which hypothetical need-frustrating scenarios were presented and participants had to report about their predicted need frustration, feelings, and demanding/withdrawing tendencies. In both studies, the following hypotheses and research questions were examined. First, we examined whether higher levels of need frustration (autonomy, competence, relatedness) would be associated with higher tendencies to demand and withdraw (H1). Second, partners who reported higher levels of need frustration (autonomy, competence, relatedness) were expected to experience higher levels of sadness, fear, and anger (H2). Third, we also expected that higher levels of sadness, fear, and anger would be associated with higher tendencies to demand and withdraw (H3). Furthermore, we explored whether sadness, fear, and anger would play a mediating role in the association between situational need frustration and demanding/withdrawing tendencies, following the theories that underpin EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008;

Johnson, 2004) (RQ1). Finally, we also explored potential gender differences in the hypothesized associations described above (RQ2).

STUDY 1: RECALL STUDY

Method

Participants. A sample of 48 males and 152 females involved in heterosexual relationships were recruited by two research assistants by means of a network-sampling technique. Each research assistant recruited participants from within her social network by means of an electronic standard information letter (including the description and purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria, and information on research ethics). Participants had to be currently in a heterosexual relationship. The average ages of the men and women were 40.44 (*SD* = 13.30, range 19-62) and 28.95 (*SD* = 9.80, range 18-68) years, respectively. The majority of the men (69%) and the women (78%) had some level of higher education (bachelor, master or PhD). Men and women reported that they had been in their current relationship for a mean of 14.62 (*SD* = 12.26, range: 0.8-56) and 7.74 (*SD* = 8.18, range: 0.2-43) years, respectively. Sixty-five percent of the men and 55% of the women were cohabiting or married. Fifty-eight percent and 32% of the men and women, respectively, had children.

Procedure. After giving their informed consent, participants took part in an online recall study in which they were asked to vividly recall a recent situation in which one of their relational needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) had been frustrated by their partner. The meanings of autonomy -, competence -, and relatedness frustration were clarified in the instructions by means of giving examples of the frustration of each need based on the SDT literature. In order to encourage accurate re-experiencing of the situation,

they were instructed to describe the situation in as much detail as possible (cf. Mauro, Sato, & Tucker, 1992). Participants were then asked to report on their level of need frustration, their feelings, and their action tendencies with respect to the recalled situation. At the end, participants were debriefed in an in-depth manner about the aim of the study and thanked for their participation. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium.

Measures.

***Need frustration*.** Need frustration was measured by means of three 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = completely untrue, 7 = completely true) on which participants rated the experienced frustration of their need for (a) autonomy ("In this situation, to what extent did you experience a lack of freedom of choice?"), (b) competence ("In this situation, to what extent did you experience a lack of appreciation for your competencies?"), and (c) relatedness ("In this situation, to what extent did you experience a lack of relatedness?").

***Feelings*.** Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they had felt (a) sad, (b) fearful, and (c) angry in the particular situation, using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = completely untrue, 7 = completely true).

***Action tendencies*.** To measure action tendencies, we used one subscale of the CoreGrid instrument (Scherer, Fontaine, & Soriano, 2013), which had been adapted for use within intimate relationships and within specific situations. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they had the tendency to behave in a specific way by means of a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = completely untrue, 7 = completely true). Based on observed behavior during actual conflict interactions (Vanhee et al., 2016c) and on the structure of the data, we computed two subscales: (1) demanding tendencies (two items; e.g., "I wanted to oppose my partner") and (2) withdrawing tendencies (three items; e.g., "I lacked the motivation to pay attention to what was going on"). Subscales scores were calculated by

computing the mean response across all items in the respective subscales, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of particular action tendencies. The Cronbach's alphas for the subscales demanding tendencies and withdrawing tendencies were .62 and .59, respectively.

Results

Descriptive statistics. In Table 1, we report the descriptive statistics of the study variables. Gender differences were found, with men experiencing lower levels of sadness and fear than women.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Need Frustration, Feelings, and Action Tendencies

	Men (n = 48)		Women (n = 152)		t
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Autonomy frustration	3.85	1.94	3.51	1.93	1.07
Competence frustration	2.58	1.84	2.75	1.94	-0.52
Relatedness frustration	3.48	2.28	3.89	1.97	-1.12
Sadness	3.88	1.99	4.66	1.92	-2.47*
Fear	2.15	1.70	2.89	2.06	-2.50*
Anger	3.94	1.98	4.56	1.97	-1.91
Demanding tendencies	2.83	1.42	3.26	1.83	-1.67
Withdrawing tendencies	2.43	1.37	2.21	1.28	1.04

Note. Each variable has a possible range of 1 to 7.

* $p < .05$.

Preliminary analyses. In Table 2, we report the correlations between the variables under study.

Table 2

Correlations between Need Frustration, Feelings, and Action Tendencies

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Autonomy frustration		.21**	.03	.11	-.02	.39**	.32**	.08
2. Competence frustration	.09		.19*	.08	.13	.26**	.28**	.27**
3. Relatedness frustration	-.02	.47**		.45**	.20*	.22**	.21**	.06
4. Sadness	.34*	.22	.36**		.34**	.46**	.31**	.13
5. Fear	-.08	.02	-.06	.42**		.04	.15	.10
6. Anger	-.08	.03	.25	.33*	.38**		.51**	.09
7. Demanding tendencies	.05	.03	.04	.11	.08	.31*		.25**
8. Withdrawing tendencies	.02	.09	.18	.05	-.10	.29*	-.00	

Note. Correlations for women are presented above the diagonal; correlations for men are presented below the diagonal.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Testing of hypotheses. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test our research hypotheses and questions. For each outcome variable, separate regression analyses were carried out. In the first step of the regression analyses, each with one of the three feelings as outcome, we included the other two feelings as control variables, as we were interested in any differential effects on feelings. In the next step, the predictors (i.e., need frustration or feelings) were included, along with gender. Finally, the interaction terms between the predictors and gender were entered in the last step, in order to examine for possible gender differences in the associations under study. Variance inflation factors (VIF), computed prior to each regression analysis, indicated the absence of multicollinearity (range: 1.01-7.74 <10; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

Need frustration and demanding/withdrawing tendencies (H1). When predicting participants' self-reported demanding tendencies during the recalled situation of need frustration, entering need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and gender in the first step explained 13% of the variance and made a significant contribution to the model, F_{change} (4,195) = 7.25, $p < .001$ (see Table 3). Both autonomy and competence frustration were significantly associated with demanding tendencies, with participants who experienced higher levels of autonomy and competence frustration also reporting higher levels of the tendency to demand, $\beta = .23$, $p < .01$ and $\beta = .16$, $p < .05$, respectively. The addition of the interaction terms in the second step did not significantly add to R^2, F_{change} (3,192) = 2.12, $p = .10$ (RQ2). Overall, the model was found to be significant, F (7,192) = 5.12, $p < .001$, and accounted for 16% of the variance in participants' demanding tendencies.

When predicting participants' tendency to withdraw, adding the predictors in the first step accounted for a significant 6% of the variance, F_{change} (4,195) = 3.00, $p < .05$ (see Table 3). This was entirely due to competence frustration, with higher levels of competence frustration being associated with higher levels of withdrawing tendencies, $\beta = .21$, $p < .01$. Entering the interaction terms in the second step did not significantly add to R^2, F_{change} (3,192) = .63, $p = .59$ (RQ2). The entire model explained 7% of the variance and was found to be marginally significant, F (7,192) = 1.97, $p = .06$.

Need frustration and sadness, fear, and anger (H2). For the prediction of self-reported sadness during the recalled situation, adding the control variables (i.e., fear and anger) in the first step made a significant contribution to the regression model, F_{change} (2,197) = 41.74, $p < .001$, explaining 30% of the variance. Entering need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and gender in the second step explained a significant 11% of the variance in sadness, F_{change} (4,193) = 8.63, $p < .001$ (see Table 4).

Frustration of relatedness was significantly associated with sadness, with higher levels of relatedness frustration found to be associated with higher levels of sadness, β = .32, p < .001. The addition of the interaction terms in the second step did not account for a significant amount of additional variance (2%), F_{change} (3,190) = 2.14, p = .10 (RQ2). Overall, the model accounted for a significant 42% of variance in levels of sadness, F (9,190) = 15.52, p < .001.

When predicting fear, only entering sadness and anger as control variables in the first step explained a significant amount of variance (14%), F_{change} (2,197) = 16.12, p < .001. Entering the predictors in the second step, F_{change} (4,193) = .95, p = .44 (see Table 4), and the interaction terms in the third step did not significantly contribute to the regression model, F_{change} (3,190) = 1.19, p = .32. Overall, the model accounted for a significant 17% of variance in levels of fear, F (9,190) = 4.41, p < .001.

When predicting participants' anger, the control variables accounted for 20% of the variance, F_{change} (2,197) = 24.29, p < .001. Adding need frustration and gender in the second step explained an additional 9% of variance, F_{change} (4,193) = 6.15, p < .001 (see Table 4). This was entirely due to autonomy frustration, which was positively associated with the experience of anger, β = .25, p < .001. Entering the interaction terms in the third step did not explain an additional significant amount of variance (3%), F_{change} (3,190) = 2.36, p = .07 (RQ2). Overall, the model was significant, F (9,190) = 9.67, p < .001, and accounted for 31% of variance in participants' levels of anger.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Demanding and Withdrawing Tendencies

	Demanding tendencies			Withdrawing tendencies		
	β	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
Step 1: Predictors		.13	7.25***		.06	3.00*
Autonomy frustration	.23**			.02		
Competence frustration	.16*			.21**		
Relatedness frustration	.13			.03		
Gender	.11			-.08		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Sadness, Fear, and Anger

	Sadness			Fear			Anger		
	β	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
Step 2: Predictors		.11	8.63***		.02	.95		.09	6.15***
Autonomy frustration	-.09			-.03			.25***		
Competence frustration	-.06			.09			.11		
Relatedness frustration	.32***			-.03			.02		
Gender	.05			.10			.08		

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Sadness, fear, anger, and demanding/withdrawing tendencies (H3). When predicting the self-reported tendency to demand during the recalled situation of need frustration, entering feelings (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger) and gender in the first step made a significant contribution to the model, F_{change} (4,195) = 15.22, $p < .001$, explaining 24% of the variance (see Table 5). Only anger contributed significantly to the model with higher levels of anger found to be associated with higher demanding tendencies, $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$. Adding the three interaction terms to the model in the second step did not significantly increase the R^2, F_{change} (3,192) = 1.81, $p = .15$ (RQ2). Overall, the model accounted for a significant 26% of variance in participants' demanding tendencies, F (7,192) = 9.58, $p < .001$.

When predicting the tendency to withdraw, neither the addition of the predictors in the first step, F_{change} (4,195) = 1.41, $p = .23$ (see Table 5) nor the addition of the interactions terms in the second step, F_{change} (3,192) = 2.03, $p = .11$, significantly contributed to the model. The entire model only explained 6% of the variance and was found to be non-significant, F (7,192) = 1.69, $p = .11$.

The mediating role of sadness, fear, and anger (RQ1). To assess whether sadness, fear, and/or anger mediated the association between need frustration and demanding/withdrawing tendencies, we followed the criteria described by Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998), which suggest mediation when (a) the predictor (i.e., frustration of autonomy, competence, or relatedness) significantly predicts the outcome (i.e., demanding/withdrawing tendencies), (b) the predictor significantly predicts the mediator (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger), (c) the mediator predicts the outcome after controlling for the predictor, and (d) after controlling for the mediator, the association between the predictor and the outcome is reduced (partial mediation) or is no longer significant (full mediation). We investigated these criteria by means of hierarchical regression analyses,

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Demanding and Withdrawing Tendencies

	Demanding tendencies			Withdrawing tendencies		
	β	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
Step 1: Predictors		.24	15.22***		.03	1.41
Sadness	.06			.05		
Fear	.07			.03		
Anger	.44***			.11		
Gender	.02			-.10		

Note. *** $p < .001$.

similar to the previous analyses but conducted separately for men and women (RQ2). To address the shortcomings of this method, we investigated whether the indirect effect of the predictor on the outcome via the mediator was significantly different from zero by means of the Sobel test (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002; Sobel, 1982).

To assess the first criterion, the regression analyses conducted to address the first hypothesis were repeated without either the predictor gender or the interaction terms. For women only, (a) frustration of autonomy, β = .27, p < .001, competence, β = .19, p < .05, and relatedness, β = .17, p < .05, significantly predicted the tendency to demand and (b) frustration of competence, β = .26, p < .01 significantly predicted the tendency to withdraw. The second criterion was investigated by re-running the analyses concerning the second hypothesis without including gender and the interaction terms as predictors. For women only, when considering the associations between need frustration and feelings, the results showed that both autonomy and competence frustration significantly predicted anger, β = .30, p < .001 and β = .18, p < .05, and only relatedness frustration significantly predicted sadness, β = .32, p < .001. To examine the third and fourth criteria, several hierarchical regressions were conducted in women in which two of the three feelings and two of the three needs were included as control variables. For each investigation for a mediating role, the frustration of the relevant need and the relevant feeling were entered in the second step. Results showed that the third criterion was fulfilled for anger, β = .38, p < .001 as it significantly predicted the tendency to demand, after controlling for autonomy frustration or competence frustration. Concerning the fourth criterion, the association between autonomy frustration and demanding tendencies was reduced and no longer significant after controlling for anger, β = .14, p = .07, indicating full mediation. The Sobel test revealed that the indirect effect was significant, Sobel z = 3.13, p < .01. The same was true for the

association between competence frustration and demanding tendencies, β = .12, p = .10, Sobel z = 2.24, p < .05. Figure 1 summarizes the results of the mediation analyses, with higher levels of autonomy and competence frustration shown to be associated with higher demanding tendencies via higher levels of anger in women.

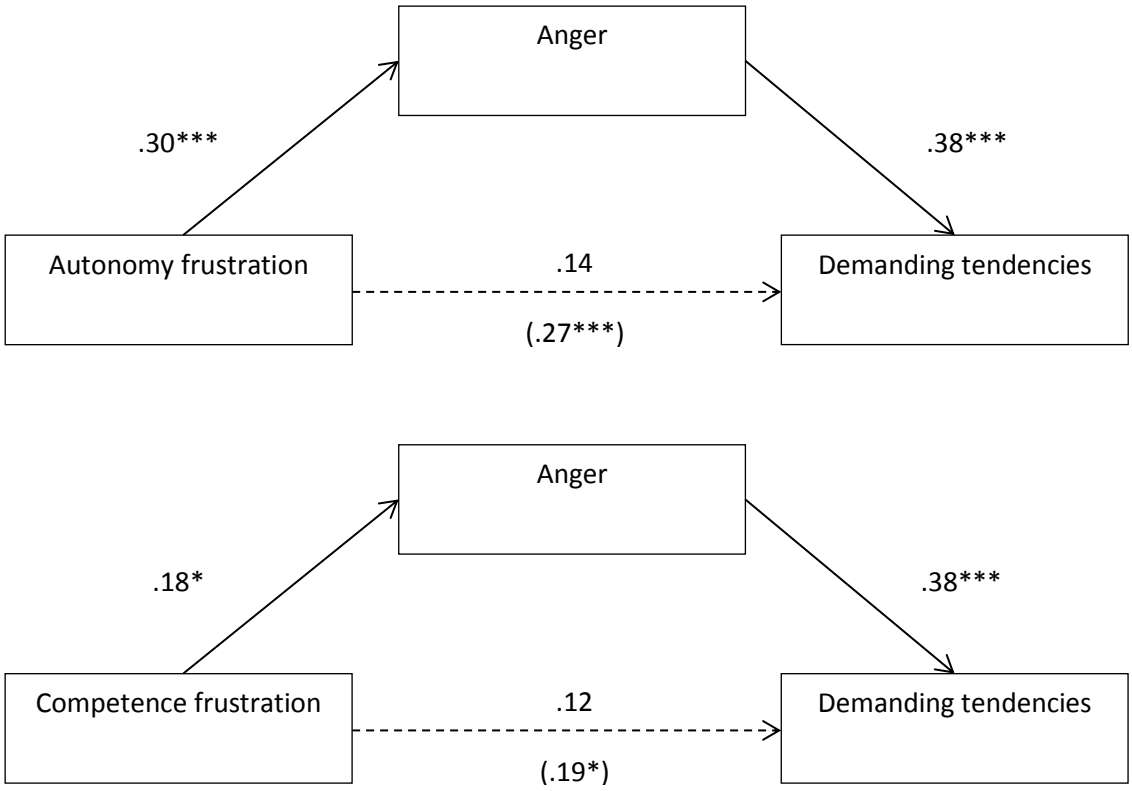

Figure 1. Anger as a mediator of autonomy/competence frustration and demanding tendencies in women.

* p < .05, *** p < .001.

Discussion

Significant associations were found between participants' relational need frustration and their demanding/withdrawing tendencies during conflict situations, in a manner that is

consistent with the first hypothesis. More specifically, our results show that higher levels of autonomy frustration were associated with higher tendencies to make demands of a partner and that higher levels of competence frustration were associated with both demanding and withdrawing tendencies. The second hypothesis was confirmed for sadness and anger, but not for fear. More specifically, participants experienced higher levels of sadness when they experienced higher levels of relatedness frustration and higher levels of anger when they experienced higher levels of autonomy frustration. Higher levels of anger appeared to be associated with higher levels of the tendency to demand, which is partially consistent with the third hypothesis, but no significant associations were found between feelings and withdrawing tendencies. Regarding the first research question about the mediating role of feelings in the association between need frustration and action tendencies, the findings show that higher levels of autonomy or competence frustration corresponded with a higher tendency to demand via higher levels of anger, but only in women. Consequently, this finding already answers, in part, our second research question, concerning gender differences in the examined associations.

Some potential limitations of the present study concern the methodology that was used. First, because participants had to recall a self-experienced situation from their past, many factors could not be controlled for (e.g., the duration or further escalation of the situation). Second, because the conceptual distinction between need satisfaction and need frustration has only been made very recently, there were no measures available for the assessment of need frustration at the time of Study 1. Therefore, we had to construct custom items in order to measure situational need frustration on the basis of SDT literature, creating one item for each particular need.

Study 2 was designed to replicate the findings of Study 1. We wanted to retest our hypotheses using a more controlled design, by applying standardized need-frustrated

situations and making measurements particularly designed to assess need frustration. Furthermore, our inclusion criteria were narrowed in order to test the robustness of our findings in a sample of participants who were involved in strong, committed intimate relationships. We also attempted to find a comparable sample of men and women, in terms of age and relationship duration.

STUDY 2: SCENARIO STUDY

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 137 males and 257 females, whose participation was solicited by using a network-sampling technique. Four research assistants recruited participants from within their social network by means of an electronic standard information letter (including the description and purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria, and information on research ethics). To participate, they had to have been involved in a heterosexual relationship for at least one year, and they had to have cohabited/been married for at least six months. The mean ages of the men and women were 41.72 (*SD* = 13.99, range 21-75) and 37.63 (*SD* = 13.82, range 18-78) years, respectively. Most men (62%) and women (64%) had some level of higher education (bachelor, master, or PhD). The average lengths of men and women's relationship were 17.32 (*SD* = 12.77, range: 1-51) and 15.09 (*SD* = 12.65, range: 1-54) years, respectively. The majority of the men (65%) and women (60%) had children.

Procedure. After participants gave their informed consent, a scenario-based study was conducted in which participants were presented with two scenarios: One of relational need satisfaction and one of need frustration. They were instructed to imagine that these fictitious situations were happening to them in their intimate relationship and then had to

answer some questions after each scenario. Participants were randomly assigned to a condition in which either their relational need for autonomy, competence, or relatedness was manipulated. Forty-four men and 91 women were allocated to the autonomy condition, 45 men and 85 women to the competence condition, and 48 men and 81 women to the relatedness condition. The presentation order of the need-satisfying and need-frustrating scenarios was varied. In this study, only the items answered after the need-frustrating scenario are considered. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium.

Measures.

***Need frustration*.** Need frustration was measured using a shortened version of the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS; Chen et al., 2015), adapted for use within intimate relationships. Six items were reformulated to be applicable to a fictitious situation and were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (completely untrue) to 5 (completely true). The subscales each consisted of two items and measured respondents' frustration of the following three needs: (a) autonomy (e.g., "During this situation, most of the things I would do would be because I feel like I have to"), (b) competence (e.g., "During this situation, I would feel insecure about what I am doing"), and (c) relatedness (e.g., "During this situation, I would sometimes have the impression that s/he dislikes me"). Subscales scores were calculated by computing the average response across the two items included in the specific subscale, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of need frustration. Cronbach's alphas indicated good internal consistencies (.74, .74, and .70, respectively). Although the specific need (autonomy, competence or relatedness) was a between-subjects factor, we assessed participants' frustration of all three needs after each scenario as intercorrelations between the three needs have been previously demonstrated (Vanhee et al., 2016c).

***Feelings*.** Feelings were measured in the same way as in Study 1, except that the items for sadness, fear, and anger were reformulated in a hypothetical way (e.g., "Indicate the extent to which you would feel sad").

***Action tendencies*.** Action tendencies were measured in the same way as in Study 1, except that the items to measure demanding and withdrawing tendencies were reformulated to be applicable to a hypothetical scenario (e.g., "I would want to do damage, hit, or say something that hurts"; "I would do nothing"). In the current study, the Cronbach's alphas for the subscales demanding and withdrawing tendencies were .61 and .65, respectively.

Results

Manipulation check. Three one-way ANOVAs were conducted with the need manipulation as predictor, and autonomy, competence, and relatedness frustration as outcome variables. The results show that the conditions had significant effects on the levels of autonomy frustration, $F(2,391) = 29.83$, $p < .001$, competence frustration, $F(2,391) = 13.71$, $p < .001$, and relatedness frustration, $F(2,391) = 8.16$, $p < .001$. The mean need frustration ratings found for each condition illustrated that our manipulation worked (see Table 6).

Descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics of the variables under study are reported in Table 7. Gender differences were found, with men expecting to experience less competence and relatedness frustration, less feelings of sadness, fear, and anger, and less the tendency to demand during the imagined situation than women.

Preliminary analyses. In Table 8, we report the correlations between the variables under study.

Table 6

Mean Levels of Need Frustration in the Different Conditions

	Condition					
	Autonomy		Competence		Relatedness	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Autonomy frustration	0.58	0.10	-0.35	0.11	-0.17	0.10
Competence frustration	-0.40	0.10	0.39	0.11	-0.30	0.10
Relatedness frustration	-0.30	0.10	-0.24	0.11	0.25	0.10

Note. This analysis was conducted on the mean-centered scores per person.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics of Need Frustration, Feelings, and Action Tendencies

	Men (*n* = 137)		Women (*n* = 257)		*t*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Autonomy frustration [a]	2.94	1.11	3.12	1.22	-1.46
Competence frustration [a]	2.85	1.18	3.29	1.22	-3.46**
Relatedness frustration [a]	3.35	1.18	3.80	1.08	-3.83***
Sadness [b]	3.93	1.91	5.28	1.76	-7.04***
Fear [b]	2.48	1.64	2.88	2.02	-2.09*
Anger [b]	4.36	1.92	5.56	1.57	-6.26***
Demanding tendencies [b]	3.18	1.44	4.01	1.61	-5.03***
Withdrawing tendencies [b]	2.81	1.29	2.62	1.36	1.37

Note. [a] These variables have a possible range of 1 to 5; [b] These variables have a possible range of 1 to 7.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 8

Correlations between Need Frustration, Feelings, and Action Tendencies

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Autonomy frustration		.31**	.31**	.20**	.28**	.29**	.25**	.19**
2. Competence frustration	.33**		.33**	.44**	.47**	.31**	.24**	.36**
3. Relatedness frustration	.46**	.53**		.46**	.25**	.45**	.27**	.12
4. Sadness	.32**	.46**	.59**		.42**	.54**	.31**	.23**
5. Fear	.18*	.41**	.43**	.51**		.23**	.22**	.42**
6. Anger	.30**	.47**	.57**	.58**	.31**		.56**	.13*
7. Demanding tendencies	.25**	.40**	.47**	.42**	.24**	.60**		.18**
8. Withdrawing tendencies	.24**	.21*	.22*	.22*	.29**	.13	.17	

Note. Correlations for women are presented above the diagonal; correlations for men are presented below the diagonal.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Testing of hypotheses. The same data analysis strategy was adopted as in the first study. More specifically, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed separately for each outcome variable. The control variables (i.e., two of the three feelings) were entered in the first step of the analyses with feelings examined as an outcome variable. The predictors (i.e., need frustration or feelings along with gender) and the interaction terms between the predictors and gender were added in the second and the third step, respectively. No multicollinearity was detected as the VIF for the predictors ranged between 1.05 and 5.38 (<10; Cohen et al., 2003).

Need frustration and demanding/withdrawing tendencies (H1). For the prediction of participants' self-reported tendency to demand during the imagined need frustration situation, adding need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and gender in the first step significantly contributed to the model and explained 20% of the variance, F_{change} (4,389) = 24.79, $p < .001$ (see Table 9). All the predictors made a significant

contribution to the model with higher levels of autonomy, β = .12, p < .05, competence, β = .16, p < .01, and relatedness frustration, β = .22, p < .001, all corresponding with higher levels of the tendency to demand. Further to those, women were found to report being more demanding than men, β = .17, p < .001. The addition of the interaction terms in the second step did not account for a significant amount of additional variance, F_{change} (3,386) = .88, p = .45 (RQ2). Overall, the model accounted for a significant 21% of variance in the tendency to demand, F (7,386) = 14.53, p < .001.

When predicting the tendency to withdraw, entering need frustration and gender in the first step accounted for a significant proportion of the variance (12%), F_{change} (4,389) = 12.60, p < .001 (see Table 9). Autonomy and competence frustration significantly contributed to the model with higher levels of autonomy, β = .12, p < .05, and competence frustration, β = .28, p < .001, being associated with higher levels of withdrawing tendencies. A gender effect was also found here: Men reported being more withdrawing than women, β = -.13, p < .05. Entering the interaction terms in the third step did not significantly contribute to the regression model, F_{change} (3,386) = 1.43, p = .23 (RQ2). Overall, the model was found to be significant, F (7,386) = 7.84, p < .001, and accounted for 12% of the variance in participants' withdrawing tendencies.

***Need frustration and sadness, fear, and anger (H2)*.** When predicting sadness during the imagined situation, the addition of fear and anger as control variables accounted for a significant 45% of the variance, F_{change} (2,391) = 159.41, p < .001. Entering need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and gender in the second step explained an additional 7% of the variance, F_{change} (4,387) = 13.97, p < .001 (see Table 10). Both competence and relatedness frustration significantly contributed to the model with higher levels of competence and relatedness frustration found to be associated with higher levels of sadness, β = .12, p < .01 and β = .22, p < .001, respectively. The positive gender

effect indicated that women reported themselves to be more sad during the imagined situation than men, β = .15, p < .001. Adding the three interaction terms in the third step did not significantly increase the model's R^2, F_{change} (3,384) = .90, p = .44 (RQ2). Overall, the model accounted for a significant 52% of variance in sadness, F (9,384) = 46.59, p < .001.

For the prediction of fear, the control variables sadness and anger explained a significant 20% of the variance, F_{change} (2,391) = 49.68, p < .001. Adding need frustration and gender in the second step accounted for an additional 9% of variance, F_{change} (4,387) = 12.60, p < .001 (see Table 10). This was entirely due to competence frustration, with higher levels of competence frustration corresponding with higher levels of fear, β = .30, p < .001. Entering the interaction terms in the third step did not significantly contribute to the regression model, F_{change} (3,384) = 2.42, p = .07 (RQ2). Overall, the model accounted for a significant 31% of the variance in fear, F (9,384) = 18.95, p < .001.

When predicting anger, the addition of the control variables sadness and fear accounted for a significant 36% of the variance, F_{change} (2,391) = 109.35, p < .001. Entering the predictors in the second step explained an additional significant amount of variance (9%), F_{change} (4,387) = 15.81, p < .001 (see Table 10). All the predictors made a significant contribution to the model with higher levels of autonomy, β = .08, p < .05, competence, β = .10, p < .05, and relatedness frustration, β = .25, p < .001, corresponding with higher levels of anger, and women reporting having experienced more anger than men, β = .13, p < .01. Adding the interaction terms in the third step did not significantly increase the model's R^2, F_{change} (3,384) = 1.84, p = .14 (RQ2). Overall, the model explained a significant 46% of variance in anger, F (9,384) = 35.85, p < .001.

Table 9

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Demanding and Withdrawing Tendencies

	Demanding tendencies			Withdrawing tendencies		
	β	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
Step 1: Predictors		.20	24.79***		.12	12.60***
Autonomy frustration	.12*			.12*		
Competence frustration	.16**			.28***		
Relatedness frustration	.22***			.00		
Gender	.17***			-.13*		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 10

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Sadness, Fear, and Anger

	Sadness			Fear			Anger		
	β	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
Step 1: Predictors		.07	13.97***		.09	12.60***		.09	15.81***
Autonomy frustration	-.03			.09			.08*		
Competence frustration	.12**			.30***			.10*		
Relatedness frustration	.22***			.03			.25***		
Gender	.15***			-.05			.13**		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Sadness, fear, anger, and demanding/withdrawing tendencies (H3). For the prediction of self-reported demanding tendencies, entering the predictors in the first step significantly contributed to the model, F_{change} (4,389) = 57.49, $p < .001$ (see Table 11) and accounted for 37% of the variance. This was due to anger, with higher levels of anger corresponding with higher levels of the tendency to demand, $\beta = .55$, $p < .001$. Adding the interaction terms in the second step did not significantly improve the regression model, F_{change} (3,386) = 1.24, $p = .30$ (RQ2). Overall, the model accounted for a significant 38% of the variance in participants' demanding tendencies, F (7,386) = 33.44, $p < .001$.

For the prediction of withdrawing tendencies, the addition of feelings and gender in the first step accounted for a significant 15% of the variance, F_{change} (4,389) = 17.26, $p < .001$ (see Table 11). Fear and gender significantly contributed to the model, indicating that higher levels of fear corresponded with higher withdrawing tendencies, $\beta = .35$, $p < .001$, and that men reported to be more withdrawing than women in response to the imagined situation, $\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$. Adding the interaction terms in the second step did not significantly increase the R^2, F_{change} (3,386) = .24, $p = .87$ (RQ2). Overall, the model accounted for a significant 15% of the variance in participants' withdrawing tendencies, F (7,386) = 9.91, $p < .001$.

The mediating role of sadness, fear, and anger (RQ1). The mediating roles of sadness, fear, and/or anger in the association between need frustration and demanding/withdrawing tendencies was examined by investigating the four criteria described by Kenny et al. (1998) and then by performing the Sobel test (MacKinnon et al., 2002; Sobel, 1982; see Study 1). To investigate the four criteria, hierarchical regressions were used in a manner that is similar to the previous analyses, but these were applied separately for men and women (RQ2). Only the results of the criteria that are relevant in light of the previous criteria are discussed.

Table 11

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Explaining Demanding and Withdrawing Tendencies

	Demanding tendencies			Withdrawing tendencies		
	β	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2	*β*	ΔR^2	*F for* ΔR^2
Step 1: Predictors		.37	57.49***		.15	17.26***
Sadness	.02			.07		
Fear	.08			.35***		
Anger	.55***			.00		
Gender	.06			-.13*		

Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

The first criterion was examined by repeating the regression analyses completed for the first hypothesis without either the predictor gender or the interaction terms. For men, frustration of competence, β = .21, p < .05, and relatedness, β = .35, p < .001, significantly predicted the tendency to demand, but no significant associations were found with withdrawing tendencies. For women, autonomy, β = .16, p < .05, competence, β = .13, p < .05, and relatedness frustration, β = .18, p < .01, were significantly associated with the tendency to demand, and competence frustration significantly predicted the tendency to withdraw, β = .34, p < .001.

The second criterion was investigated by rerunning the analyses of the second hypothesis, without including gender or the interaction terms as predictors. The relevant results showed that for men both competence and relatedness frustration significantly predicted anger, β = .18, p < .05 and β = .31, p < .01, respectively. Competence frustration was also a significant predictor of fear, β = .20, p < .05, and relatedness frustration was a predictor of sadness, β = .23, p < .05. For women, autonomy frustration significantly predicted fear, β = .14, p < .05, and anger, β = .14, p < .05, competence frustration significantly predicted sadness, β = .17, p < .01, and fear, β = .32, p < .001, and relatedness frustration also significantly predicted sadness, β = .21, p < .001, and anger, β = .22, p < .001.

To examine the third and fourth criteria, several hierarchical regressions were conducted in which two of the three feelings and frustration of two of the three needs were included as control variables. The frustration of the respective need and the specific feeling of which the mediating role was under investigation, were entered in the second step.

In men, after controlling for competence or relatedness frustration, only anger significantly predicted demanding tendencies, β = .45, p < .001, meeting the third criterion. Concerning the fourth criterion, in the case of competence frustration the association between this and demanding tendencies was reduced and no longer significant, β = .10, p =

.27, after controlling for anger, indicating full mediation. The Sobel test revealed that the indirect effect was significant, Sobel $z = 2.00$, $p < .05$. Considering the fourth criterion, in the case of relatedness frustration full mediation by anger was supported as relatedness frustration was no longer a significant predictor of demanding tendencies, $\beta = .13$, $p = .20$, after anger was controlled for. The Sobel test also revealed a significant indirect effect, Sobel $z = 2.78$, $p < .01$. To summarize, for men, higher levels of competence and relatedness frustration were found to be associated with higher levels of the tendency to demand via higher levels of anger (see Figure 2).

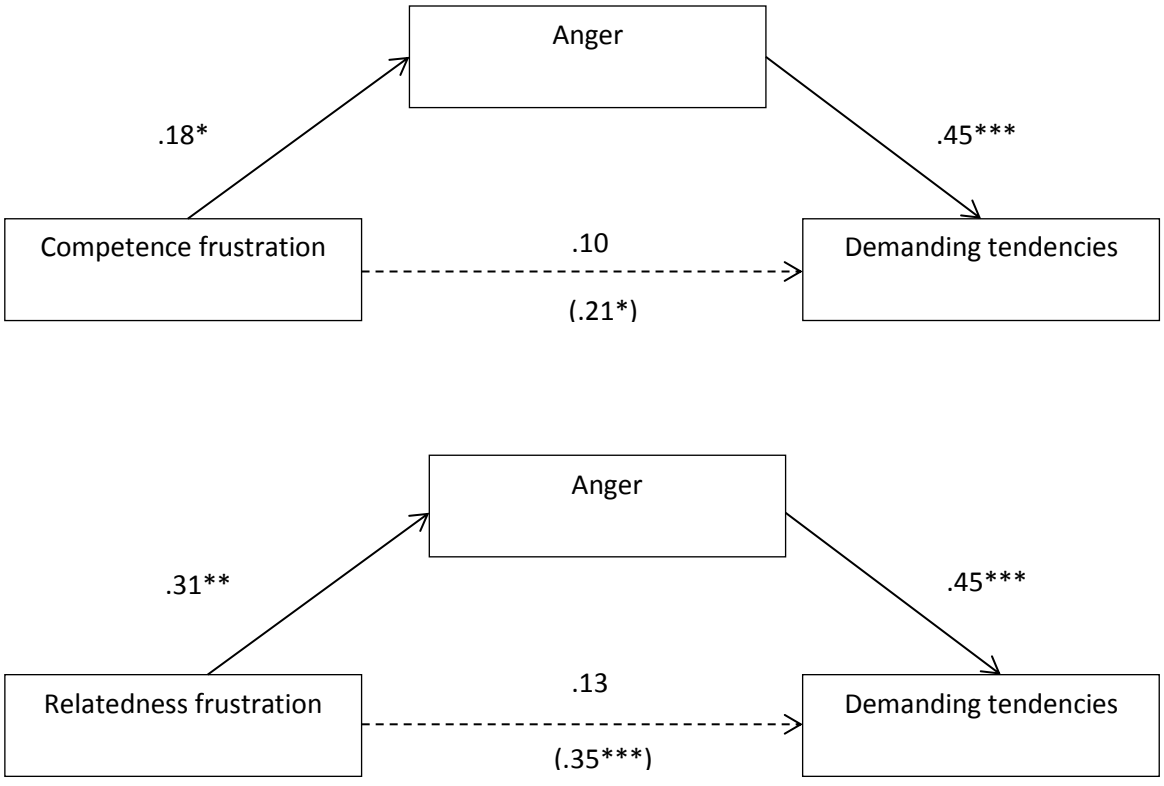

Figure 2. Significant mediation models for men.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Concerning demanding tendencies in women, the third criterion was fulfilled for anger, β = .53, p < .001, as it significantly predicted the tendency to demand, after controlling for autonomy frustration and after controlling for relatedness frustration. Concerning withdrawing tendencies in women, after controlling for competence frustration, fear significantly predicted withdrawing tendencies, β = .31, p < .001, meeting the third criterion. The fourth criterion was met for all three possible mediation models. More specific, the association between autonomy frustration and demanding tendencies was no longer significant after anger was controlled for, β = .08, p = .16, indicating full mediation. The same was true for the association between relatedness frustration and demanding tendencies, β = -.02, p = .81, after controlling for anger. The Sobel tests for both models confirmed that the indirect effects were significant, Sobel z = 2.41, p < .05, Sobel z = 3.37, p < .001, respectively. Furthermore, partial mediation by fear of the association between competence frustration and withdrawing tendencies was supported, as the coefficient of competence frustration was reduced but still significant, β = .21, p < .01, after controlling for fear. The Sobel test, Sobel z = 3.46, p < .001, confirmed a significant indirect effect.

Figure 3 shows that, for women, higher levels of autonomy or relatedness frustration were found to be associated with higher levels of the tendency to demand via higher levels of anger and that higher levels of competence frustration were associated with higher levels of withdrawing tendencies, partially via higher levels of fear.

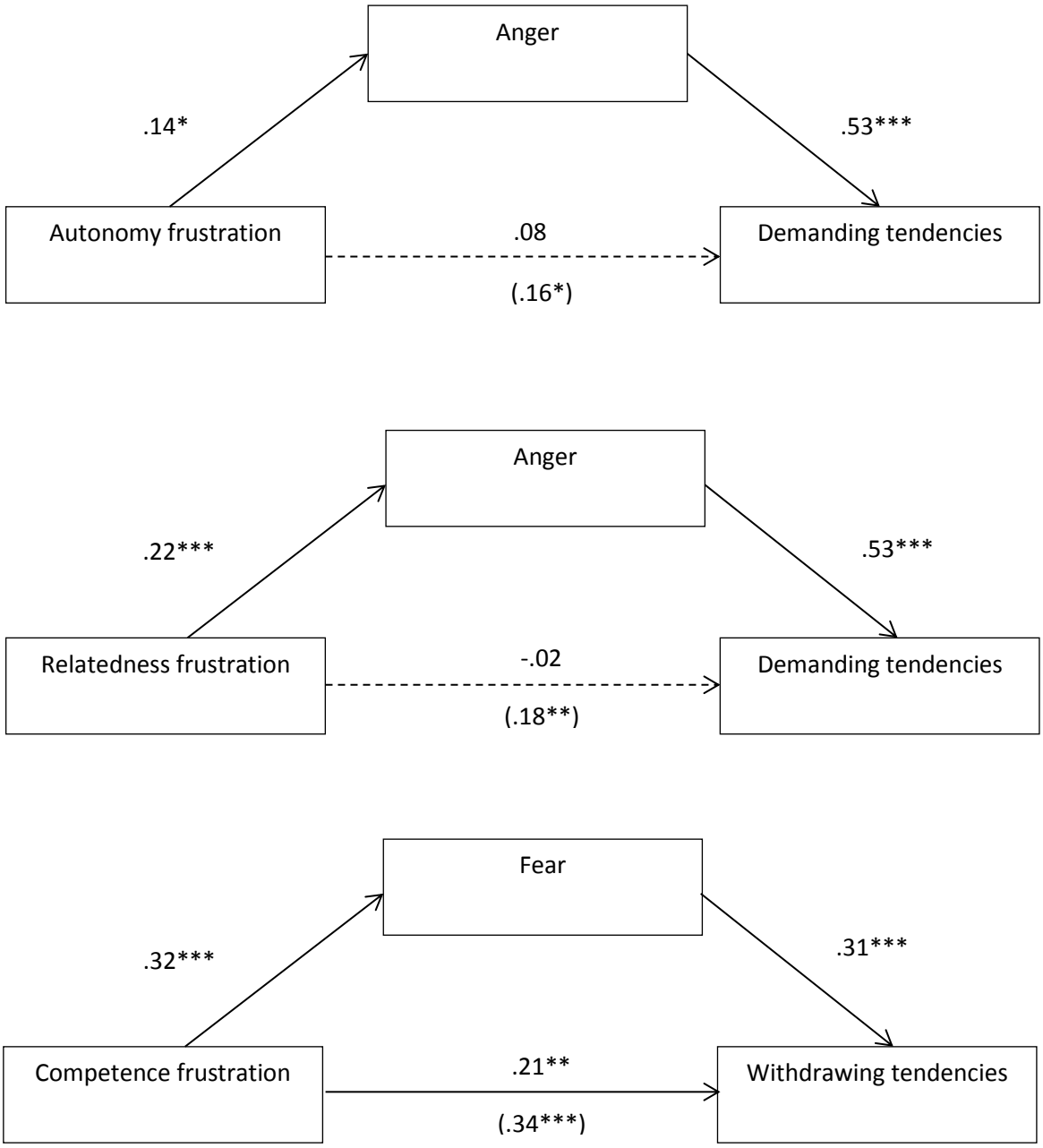

Figure 3. Significant mediation models for women.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated most of the results of Study 1 and revealed other significant associations that were in line with the hypotheses. Concerning the first hypothesis, in addition to autonomy and competence frustration (cf. Study 1), relatedness frustration was found to be a significant predictor of demanding tendencies. In the same vein, autonomy frustration was found to be positively associated with withdrawing tendencies in Study 2, in addition to the significant predictive effect previously found for competence frustration (cf. Study 1).

Consistent with the second hypothesis, Study 2 revealed that higher levels of competence frustration were associated with higher levels of sadness, fear, and anger. The results of Study 1 were further expanded upon by the finding that relatedness frustration was a predictor of anger. Furthermore, the positive associations between relatedness frustration and sadness, and between autonomy frustration and anger of Study 1 were replicated in Study 2.

Furthermore, consistent with Study 1, participants experiencing higher levels of anger reported higher levels of demanding tendencies. Regarding withdrawing tendencies, the non-significant results of Study 1 were extended by the finding of a positive association between fear and withdrawing tendencies in Study 2.

Concerning the first research question, the mediating role of anger in the association between autonomy frustration and demanding tendencies in women was confirmed. Study 2 complemented this finding by demonstrating that, in women, anger also accounted for the association between relatedness frustration and demanding tendencies and fear partially mediated the association between competence frustration and withdrawing tendencies. Furthermore, in men, competence and relatedness frustration predicted demanding tendencies via anger. However, the mediating role of anger in the association

between competence frustration and demanding tendencies in women could not be replicated in Study 2. Except for these differences between men and women, no gender differences were detected in the investigated associations.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the present research, the associations between relational need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), negative feelings (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger) and action tendencies (i.e., demanding and withdrawing tendencies) during conflict situations were examined using two different research methodologies.

Taken together, we found evidence that frustration of autonomy (Studies 1 and 2), competence (Studies 1 and 2), and relatedness (Study 2) is predictive for demanding tendencies. More specifically, people reporting higher levels of frustration of their need for autonomy, competence, or relatedness appear to be more inclined to behave in a demanding way towards their partner. The results on autonomy in the current study converge with the results of observational research that has demonstrated an association between autonomy frustration and demanding behavior in women (Vanhee et al., 2016c). Our findings on competence are consistent with previous survey research that has shown an association between competence frustration and demanding behavior in men (Vanhee et al., 2016b). Finally, relatedness has been found in both survey and observational research to be a predictor of demanding behavior in women (Vanhee et al., 2016b, c). These findings provide further evidence for the idea that demanding behavior can result from a broad range of situations where needs have been frustrated, independent of the particular need that has been frustrated or the specific relationship area in which change is desired (Verhofstadt et al., 2005). Consequently, while working with partners who blame, criticize,

and accuse each other (i.e., demanding behavior), couple therapists should not restrict their focus on relatedness issues, as is often the case, but rather attempt to take into account autonomy and competence issues.

The hypothesized positive association between need frustration and withdrawing tendencies was confirmed for competence frustration (Studies 1 and 2) and autonomy frustration (Study 2). These results are in line with previous findings of higher levels of autonomy frustration (in men) accompanying higher levels of withdrawing behavior (Vanhee et al., 2016b). However, the finding in the latter study that relatedness frustration (in men and women) might also be a predictor of withdrawing behavior could not be confirmed in the current research. It is possible that these different results are due to a methodological issue. In particular, the fictitious scenario used to induce relatedness frustration ends with the partner leaving the room, which may lead to a lower tendency to withdraw. In summary, across methods it has been found that relational need frustration gives rise to negative conflict behavior/tendencies, including demanding as well as withdrawing behavior/tendencies.

Both studies agreed on the association between need frustration and negative feelings. More specifically, evidence was found for higher levels of competence (Study 2) and relatedness frustration (Studies 1 and 2) corresponding with higher levels of sadness. Furthermore, competence frustration was also found to correspond with higher levels of fear (Study 2). Finally, for anger, each need appeared to be a significant predictor (Study 1: autonomy; Study 2: autonomy, competence, and relatedness). These results were in line with results from observational research that has shown significant associations between relatedness frustration and sadness (in men) and between autonomy and competence frustration, on the one hand, and anger on the other in both men and women (Vanhee et al., 2016c). The current findings also agree with the SDT literature on the consequences of

maladaptive coping with need frustration (Kasser, 2002; Sebire et al., 2009) and on the association between need dissatisfaction and negative feelings in general (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, as it appears that each of the feelings that we studied can signal that needs are frustrated (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Keltner & Haidt, 1999), these feelings can serve as an important source of information in couple therapy.

The hypothesized link between negative feelings and demanding/withdrawing tendencies was also demonstrated in both of our studies. Concerning demanding tendencies, we found evidence that participants experiencing higher levels of anger also reported a higher tendency to demand things of their partner (Studies 1 and 2), which was in line with observational research reporting the same results (Vanhee et al., 2016c). The expected positive link between sadness and fear, on the one hand, and demanding tendencies, on the other, could not be confirmed. These findings can be explained by the emotion literature, in which anger is believed to be associated with antagonistic tendencies such as moving against or attacking the other person in order to induce change (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 2011), whereas sadness and fear are more linked to tendencies that reduce interaction with a partner (Roseman, 2011). Empirical research by Sanford (2007), in which negative feelings are divided into hard (i.e., anger or irritation) and soft (i.e., sadness or hurt) feelings, has also demonstrated that hard feelings are more consistently linked in a positive manner to negative communication (i.e., criticism and defensiveness) than soft feelings.

Regarding withdrawing tendencies, fear was found to be a predictor with higher levels of fear corresponding with higher levels of withdrawing tendencies (Study 2). This finding is in line with our hypotheses as well as with the emotion literature, where fear has been linked with avoiding tendencies (Roseman, 2011). However, none of the other negative feelings appeared to be significant predictors of withdrawing tendencies, despite

previous observational research showing a positive association between anger and withdrawing behavior (Vanhee et al., 2016c). These different results might be due to the distinction between action tendencies and behavior. Although there is a close relationship between the two, there is not a one-to-one relationship, as other processes can influence the transition from an action tendency to a behavior (e.g., emotion regulation; Fontaine & Scherer, 2013). As such, it is possible that withdrawing tendencies do not always give rise to withdrawing behavior.

Our investigation of the relations between need frustration, feelings, and action tendencies provides evidence for mediation models in which anger serves as a mediator and demanding tendencies act as an outcome variable. More specifically, in men, we found evidence for the mediating role of anger in the association between competence and relatedness frustration, on the one hand, and demanding tendencies, on the other (Study 2). In women, we found evidence for anger as a mediator of the association between autonomy (Studies 1 and 2), competence (Study 1), and relatedness frustration (Study 2), on the one hand, and demanding tendencies, on the other. This latter association with autonomy frustration as predictor has also been found in observational research (Vanhee et al., 2016c). Additionally, the association between competence frustration and withdrawing tendencies appeared to be also partially mediated by fear in women (Study 2). These mediation models coincide with Emotion-Focused therapies for couples (EFT-C's; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), in which it is argued that partners' feelings, especially reactive feelings such as anger, lead to destructive behaviors towards a partner in an attempt to cope with and to protect against need frustration.

In general the results were comparable for men and women, with the exception of some mediation models, described above, being different for men and women. For instance, for women only, autonomy frustration was a predictor of anger, which in turn

predicted demanding tendencies, whereas relatedness frustration was a predictor of anger for both genders, which in turn predicted demanding tendencies. These findings contradict the widespread belief that autonomy and psychological freedom within the relationship are especially important for men while women mainly value love, intimacy, and care in the relationship (Kite, 2009). Couple therapists should take into account our—perhaps counterintuitive—findings.

Both studies were designed to overcome the limitations of other studies (by, for example, controlling extraneous factors by presenting standardized scenarios), yet some more general limitations can be noted. The first potential limitation concerns our sample characteristics. Both samples consisted mostly of women, which could have influenced the results, especially those concerning gender differences. Furthermore, we used samples of middle-class, heterosexual individuals, which limits the generalizability of our findings. An important goal for future research will be to replicate these findings with more diverse samples (in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation). Another limitation involves the relatively low number of items used within our measurements. As such, the possibility exists that those items did not fully capture the underlying constructs. In future research it would be valuable to use more items, which can assess more differential expressions of the same variable and as such draw a more complete image. Finally, all findings were based on correlational and cross-sectional data, which precludes assertions on the direction of the effects between need frustration, feelings, and demanding/withdrawing tendencies. Longitudinal or experimental research is necessary to provide evidence on the temporal and causal relations between the variables.

Despite these limitations, we believe that our results contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between need frustration, feelings, and action tendencies in intimate relationships. One of the greatest strengths of this paper is that it adopted a

multi-method approach, as it provided the opportunity to draw stronger conclusions about the interrelations between need frustration, feelings, and action tendencies. Furthermore, the design allowed us to gain a more detailed picture of these interrelations by examining specific situations.

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CHAPTER 7

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, we briefly recapitulate the research goals of this doctoral project and present an integrated overview of the most important findings. Following that, we present some theoretical reflections on our results and elaborate on possible implications for couple therapy. Finally, the limitations of the studies we conducted are considered, and some suggestions are formulated for future research on relational needs in intimate relationships.

RECAPITULATION OF THE RESEARCH GOALS

In order to obtain more evidence-based insights into how couple therapists can help couples deal with conflict within their relationships, our understanding of the origins of relationship conflict needs to be deepened. In this dissertation, we aimed to contribute to this research area by approaching relationship conflict from a relational needs perspective. Although different bodies of work, including the couple therapy literature and the emotion literature, have suggested associations between relational needs on the one hand and relationship conflict and dissatisfaction on the other, with emotions playing a central role, the empirical evidence on each of these associations is scarce. Furthermore, evidence on the interplay of all these variables could be said to be non-existent.

Therefore, the central aim of the present dissertation was to examine the associations between relational needs, relationship conflict/dissatisfaction, and emotions in a systematic and rigorous way. In line with the assumptions outlined by contemporary emotion-focused approaches to couple therapy (i.e., Emotionally Focused Therapy, Johnson, 2004; Emotion-Focused Therapy, Greenberg & Goldman, 2008) and also with recent relational needs perspectives (i.e., Self-Determination Theory, Deci & Ryan 2000), we set three sub-goals in which we investigated whether (see Figure 1):

(a) Higher levels of frustration of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are associated with higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction and with relationship conflict (higher conflict frequency, higher number of conflict topics, and lower and higher levels of constructive and destructive conflict behavior, respectively).

(b) Higher levels of frustration of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are associated with higher levels of sadness, fear, and anger.

(c) Sadness, fear, and anger mediate the association between the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and relationship conflict (behavior).

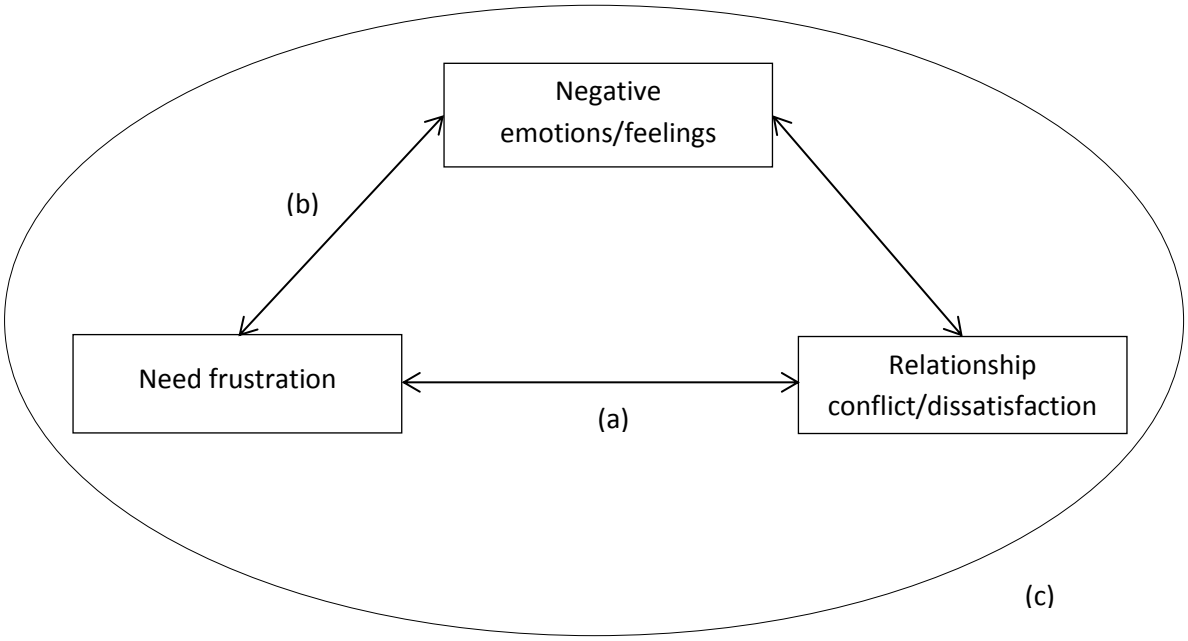

Figure 1. Overview of the three sub-goals.

We began our investigation with an extensive review of the couple research and therapy literature and the emotion literature on the interrelations between relational needs, relationship conflict/dissatisfaction, and emotions, as outlined by Emotionally Focused Couple Therapies (EFT-Cs) (*Chapter 2*). Following that, in the first empirical study (*Chapter 3*) we examined whether relational need satisfaction and need frustration are correlates of relationship satisfaction. In our second empirical study (*Chapter 4*), as well as attempting to replicate the association between relational need frustration and relationship dissatisfaction, we assessed the associations between relational need frustration on the one hand and relationship conflict frequency, - topics, and - patterns on the other. In the two remaining empirical studies, we explored how relational need frustration is associated with relationship conflict behavior. More specifically, we examined

whether emotions, and in specific, feelings of sadness, fear, and anger, offer an explanation for the link between need frustration and first of all observed conflict behaviors (*Chapter 5*) and then self-reported conflict action tendencies (*Chapter 6*).

In our research, we aimed to add to the existing literature by paying attention to the distinction between (dis)satisfaction and frustration of relational needs. We also worked to reach varying samples in terms of relationship duration and age (as many studies have focused upon students engaged in a short-term or average-length relationships). Furthermore, we contributed to existing knowledge by using different methodologies (instead of just questionnaires) to examine the associations mentioned above.

OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

Chapter 2: Literature Review on Relational Needs, Emotions, and Relationship Conflict/Dissatisfaction

Chapter 2 consisted of a literature review of the existing theoretical and empirical evidence from research on emotions, couples and couple therapy on the interrelations between relational needs, relationship conflict/dissatisfaction, and emotions in intimate relationships. The starting point of this literature overview were the assumptions made by contemporary EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), which outline associations between these variables. More specifically, EFT-Cs generally assume that (a) couple conflict and relationship distress result from partners being unable to meet each other's needs, (b) unmet needs lead to specific negative emotions in partners, and (c) specific negative emotions, accompanying unmet needs, give rise to specific conflict behaviors in partners, resulting in negative interaction cycles between them over time. Both these general ideas and the specific elaborations made by each EFT-C model

included in our manuscript were reviewed in light of the couple research and emotion literature.

Our literature review led us to three main conclusions: First, the general assumptions outlined by EFT-Cs on need frustration, emotional responses, and conflict behavior patterns are largely supported by evidence from couple research and emotion literature. Second, less straightforward evidence has been found for the specific elaborations of these principles made by EFT-Cs (e.g., the suggestion that unmet identity needs lead to dominant-submissive interaction cycles in couples). Third, a lack of systematic research addressing the assumptions of EFT-Cs hampers strong conclusions. Based on these conclusions, we developed suggestions for future research on the interrelations with attention on current insights in the emotion and couple literature, which set the scene for the empirical studies included within the current dissertation.

Chapter 3: Need Satisfaction/Frustration and Relationship Satisfaction

In this first empirical study, an initial step was taken to address the lack of systematic and rigorous empirical examination of relational needs in intimate relationships. This was done by investigating whether the degree of an individual's relational need satisfaction and frustration is related to how he or she evaluates the intimate relationship (i.e., relationship satisfaction) (sub-goal a, see Figure 1). Although several studies had previously investigated the part played by relational need *satisfaction* in the prediction of relationship functioning (e.g., Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012), little is currently known about the role of relational need *frustration*, especially as compared to need satisfaction. By examining the relative value of the satisfaction and frustration of one's relational needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in association with relationship satisfaction, we aimed to make a contribution to the existing research.

Based on previous findings on need satisfaction and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Uysal et al., 2012), we expected that satisfaction of an individual's relational needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) would be positively associated, and frustration of their relational needs would be negatively associated, with their general satisfaction with the intimate relationship. We also hypothesized that relational need satisfaction would be a better correlate of relationship satisfaction than relational need frustration because of previous findings that have shown need satisfaction to be a stronger predictor of individual well-being than need frustration (e.g., Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011). On the basis of the findings of Patrick and colleagues (2007), we further supposed that the need for relatedness would be the strongest correlate of relationship satisfaction, as compared to the need for autonomy or competence. In addition, gender differences were explored in the associations outlined above.

Survey data from 372 men and women, each of whom was involved in a committed heterosexual relationship, were used to answer our research questions. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that (a) as expected, self-reported need satisfaction and need frustration were both associated with self-reported relationship satisfaction, (b) need satisfaction was found to be a stronger correlate with higher relationship satisfaction than need frustration, and (c) the satisfaction or frustration of the need for relatedness was the only significant correlate of relationship satisfaction, as compared to the need for autonomy or competence. No gender interactions were found.

In summary, these findings validate the role of satisfaction/frustration of relational needs, especially the need for relatedness, in explaining partners' relationship satisfaction.

Chapter 4: Need Frustration and Relationship Conflict/Dissatisfaction

In Chapter 4, we narrowed our examination to the *frustration* of relational needs as it was thought to be more suitable when looking at maladaptive outcomes, such as relationship conflict and dissatisfaction. Building upon the findings of the previous study (Chapter 3), the first aim of this chapter was to assess relational need frustration as a correlate of relationship dissatisfaction (sub-goal a, see Figure 1). Our second aim was to obtain a more detailed picture than had been achieved by previous studies (Patrick et al., 2007) of the association between relational needs and relationship conflict, by assessing multiple components of conflict (sub-goal a, see Figure 1). To be more specific, we examined to what extent partners' frustrated needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) were associated with how *often* partners disagree (i.e., conflict frequency), what they disagree about (i.e., conflict topics), and how they disagree (i.e., conflict behavior patterns). Finally, this study also aimed to add to existing findings by exploring whether an individual's partner's level of need frustration, as well as their own, was associated with the individual's level of relationship dissatisfaction and conflict.

Based on the previous study (Chapter 3), we expected that higher levels of need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) would be associated with higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction, with the need for relatedness as the strongest correlate. In response to Patrick and colleagues (2007), we also hypothesized that individuals who reported higher levels of need frustration would more frequently initiate conflict with their partner and report a broader range of topics that they initiate conflict about. We also expected higher levels of need frustration in both partners to be associated with more destructive (i.e., demand-withdrawal, man demand-woman withdrawal, woman demand-man withdrawal, mutual avoidance and withholding) and less constructive patterns of behavior

during conflict. Furthermore, actor and partner effects were taken into account. Additionally, potential gender differences in these associations were explored.

Surveys were completed by 230 committed heterosexual couples. Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) and regression analyses revealed that partners' self-reported need frustration was associated with how dissatisfied they reported to be with their relationship, how frequently they reported initiating conflict, and how they reported to behave during conflicts, but not with the number of conflict topics they reported arguing about. Regarding the specific type of need frustration, relatedness frustration mattered most, as all of the aforementioned associations were true for relatedness, including all of the specific behavioral patterns covered by our analysis. In contrast with this, rather limited evidence was found for autonomy and competence, with autonomy frustration being associated with more dissatisfaction and, in men, with less constructive and more avoidant and withholding conflict strategies, and only men's competence frustration was found to be associated with more demand-withdrawal and man demand-women withdrawal. Furthermore, it was found that both an individual's own and their partner's need frustration (especially relatedness) played a role in dissatisfaction and conflict. Finally, although most of the results were consistent across gender, gender differences were found for how need frustration affects couples' conflict communication. More specifically, a couple's conflict behavioral patterns were fuelled by both the male and the female partners' relatedness frustration, but also by men's autonomy and competence frustration.

To conclude, further validation was provided for the role of relational need frustration in intimate relationships by highlighting relational need frustration as the driver of relationship dissatisfaction and relationship conflict (including altered frequency and behavior patterns).

Chapter 5: Need Frustration and Conflict Behavior: The Role of Feelings

Chapter 5 sought to address the fact that the observations in the couple research literature, as well as our previous study on the link between relational needs and conflict, have primarily relied on surveys. As surveys have well-known disadvantages (Schwartz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998), it has been suggested as essential to replicate survey-based findings with data from other research methods. Therefore, an observational research design was used to deepen our knowledge on the association between relational need frustration and conflict behavior (sub-goal a, see Figure 1). More specifically, this approach allowed us to obtain an objective analysis of partners' conflict behaviors and a more immediate and interaction-based assessment of partners' need frustration during conflicts. In order to shed a light on which specific behavior correlates with an individual's need frustration, we focused on partners' individual conflict behaviors, such as demanding and withdrawing behavior, instead of couples' conflict patterns as had been studied in the previous chapter. As no previous study had addressed *how* relational need frustration is associated with conflict (behavior), another major aim of this study was to explore the role of emotions, and in specific feelings, in this association (sub-goal b and c, see Figure 1).

In line with the previous study, we expected that higher levels of need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) during conflict situations would be associated with higher levels of observed destructive conflict behavior (i.e., demanding/withdrawing behavior). Inspired by SDT literature, and that on emotion and couple therapy/research, we investigated whether the degree of need frustration would be positively linked to negative feelings (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger) and whether negative feelings in turn would be positively linked to destructive conflict behavior. With regard to the interplay between need frustration, conflict behavior and feelings, our mediation analyses, which looked at the role of feelings as mediators in the association between need frustration and conflict behavior, were both explorative but inspired by

the directions suggested in EFT-Cs (see Chapter 2; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004).

Observational and self-report data (i.e., from questionnaires and video-review tasks) from 141 heterosexual committed couples were analyzed, separately for men and women. As hypothesized, evidence was found for a general association between interaction-based need frustration and observed destructive behavior (to be more specific, this included demanding behavior in both men and women and withdrawing behavior in women only). Regarding the specific type of need, unique associations were found between interaction-based autonomy and relatedness frustration on the one hand and observed demanding behavior on the other, although only for women. The results, moreover, indicated that partners' interaction-based need frustration corresponded with them experiencing negative feelings during conflict interactions. For both men and women, higher levels of interaction-based autonomy and competence frustration were associated with higher levels of interaction-based anger. In addition, for male partners, scoring higher on relatedness frustration was related to higher levels of sadness and fear during conflict interactions. For female partners, higher levels of interaction-based autonomy frustration correlated with experiencing higher levels of interaction-based fear. Furthermore, concerning the relationship between interaction-based feelings and observed conflict behavior, we demonstrated a positive link between the negative feeling anger and demanding and withdrawing behavior exhibited by both genders. In women, higher levels of interaction-based fear were associated with lower levels of observed demanding behavior. Finally, a full mediating role was demonstrated for anger in the association between autonomy frustration and demanding behavior during conflict interactions, but only for women.

Taken together, this evidence on relational need frustration experienced during actual conflict interactions confirms its value in predicting certain types of destructive conflict behavior as well as experiences of negative feelings during conflict interactions.

However, there seem to be different roles played by relatedness, autonomy, and competence frustration, depending on the type of feeling and conflict behavior under examination.

Chapter 6: Need Frustration and Conflict Action Tendencies: The Role of Feelings

In our final chapter, the robustness of our findings was assessed by addressing similar hypotheses and research questions to the previous chapter whilst applying two other methodological designs. In the first study we made use of a recall design and in the second one an imagination design with standardized situations was used. Both studies focused on action tendencies rather than on overt conflict behavior because they are assumed to precede overt behavior and are thought to be less influenced by attempts at regulation (Carver, 2006). In both studies, we examined the associations between the type of relational needs that were frustrated (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness), the type of feelings that were experienced (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger), and the type of conflict action tendencies that were raised (i.e., demanding and withdrawing) in conflict situations (sub-goal a, b, and c, see Figure 1). Gender differences in the hypothesized associations were also explored.

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted on samples of 200 (Study 1) and 397 individuals (Study 2) involved in a heterosexual intimate relationship. Taken together, the results of both studies indicated that partners' interaction-based need frustration was associated with their interaction-based action tendencies. Higher levels of frustration of each need (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were associated with more demanding tendencies, and higher levels of autonomy and competence frustration were associated with more withdrawing tendencies. The results, moreover, indicated that the type of interaction-based feelings that participants experienced depended upon the type of interaction-based need frustration they reported. Higher levels of competence frustration corresponded with higher levels of

the experience of sadness, fear, and anger, and higher levels of relatedness frustration were associated with more sadness and anger. Autonomy frustration was only found to be a correlate of anger. Furthermore, concerning the relations between feelings and action tendencies during conflict interactions, we only demonstrated a positive link between the negative feeling anger and demanding tendencies. Concerning withdrawing tendencies, fear was found to be a correlate. Our results were similar for both men and women. Finally, during conflict situations anger was found to be a mediator in the association between frustration of autonomy (women), competence (men and women), and relatedness (men and women) on the one hand, and demanding tendencies, on the other. In women, fear was also found to be a mediator between competence frustration and withdrawing tendencies.

In summary, additional support was generated for the existence of a link between relational need frustration and conflict behavior, explaining how relational need frustration is associated with conflict behavior.

A SUMMARY VIEW ON THE ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN RELATIONAL NEEDS, NEGATIVE EMOTIONS/FEELINGS, AND RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT/DISSATISFACTION

Relational Needs and Relationship Conflict and Dissatisfaction

The major goal of this doctoral dissertation was divided into three smaller aims, of which the first was to investigate whether the satisfaction/frustration partners experience of their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness plays a role in relationship dissatisfaction and relationship conflict (sub-goal a, see Figure 1).

With regard to relationship dissatisfaction, we can conclude that both satisfaction and frustration of relational needs in general are important in explaining relationship (dis)satisfaction, confirming findings of prior investigations (Patrick et al., 2007; Uysal et al., 2012; see Chapter 3 & 4). Although, according to Self-Determination

Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs all matter equally in intimate relationships, our findings suggest that in the evaluation of someone's relationship, an individual's need for relatedness is the most important of these, followed by their need for autonomy. Needs relating to competence have been found to play no significant role. These differential associations are in line with previous studies showing similar findings (Patrick et al., 2007; Uysal et al., 2012). Moreover, as has been found by previous research (Hadden, Smith, & Knee, 2013; Patrick et al., 2007), the cardinal role of the need for relatedness was emphasized by the finding that the extent to which an individual's partner's need for relatedness is frustrated affects relationship dissatisfaction just as their own relatedness frustration does.

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, the association between relational need frustration and relationship conflict was addressed and generally supported. Different roles are played by autonomy, competence, and relatedness frustration, depending on which component of conflict was examined.

Concerning conflict frequency, experiencing greater relatedness frustration was found to be associated with initiating conflicts at a higher frequency (see Chapter 4). This is in line with the study of Patrick and colleagues (2007), in which relatedness was also found to be the strongest correlate of conflict frequency. Our findings further extend those of this latter study by demonstrating not only an actor effect but also a partner effect for relatedness frustration.

The most frequently examined component of conflict, and that which has been approached with the most different methodologies, was conflict behavior[1]. A consistent finding across the chapters was that higher levels of need frustration are associated with lower levels of constructive behavior (patterns) and with higher levels of destructive behavior (patterns; see Chapters 4, 5, & 6). These findings are in line with previous research addressing constructive and destructive responses to conflict in general (Patrick

[1] Evidence of conflict action tendencies as studied in Chapter 6 is considered as evidence of conflict behaviors as tendencies are seen as preceding behavior (Carver, 2006).

et al., 2007). By examining individuals' demanding and withdrawing behaviors and couples' patterns of mutual constructive communication, mutual avoidance, and demand-withdrawal, this dissertation extends the knowledge on needs and conflict behavior by examining more specific behaviors. In particular, relational need frustration was found to be associated with demanding and withdrawing behavior across specific situations (see Chapters 5 & 6). Although the role of each specific type of need on demanding behavior depended on which methodology had been used, each specific type of need was found to be related to demanding behavior across the different studies. These results are in line with the conflict literature, which shows that people who desire change from their partner or in their relationship typically display behaviors meant to elicit change in their partner, such as accusing, complaining, and pressuring for change (i.e., demanding behavior; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Papp, Kouros, & Cummings, 2009), irrespective of what changes are required (Verhofstadt, Buysse, De Clercq, & Goodwin, 2005). By contrast, the evidence for individuals' withdrawing behavior is less convincing as a) in observational research (see Chapter 5) unique associations were only found with need frustration as a whole rather than the specific types of needs, and this was only in women, and b) in Chapter 6, only autonomy (Study 2) and competence frustration (Studies 1&2) were found to be significant correlates.

Regarding patterns of conflict behavior, however, patterns that involve withdrawing behavior (such as mutual avoidance or demand-withdrawal) were found to be associated with specific types of need frustration (see Chapter 4). This more obvious trend, found in the survey study, might be due to the fact that withdrawing behavior is often seen as the last stage in a cascade that escalates from criticizing (i.e., demanding), to contempt, and defensiveness (Gottman, 1994). As such, need frustration might be particularly related to withdrawing behavior when relational needs are frustrated for a significant period of time, which can be detected by survey studies in which partners assemble several situations into global perceptions. Studies with an observation-, recall-,

or imagine design are possibly less suitable for investigating the detrimental associations of need frustration with conflict behavior in the long-term because of its narrow time frame (i.e., specific situations and interactions). Furthermore, taking into account all the studied conflict patterns, it seems that couples' conflict behaviors are especially likely to be fuelled by relatedness frustration experienced by both partners, but mutual constructive communication and mutual avoidance also seem to be underpinned by men's autonomy frustration and demand-withdrawal is more often related to men's competence frustration (see Chapter 4).

Furthermore, no evidence was found for need frustration being related to the number of topics partners initiate conflict about (see Chapter 4). This finding might result from the fact that the people in the sample used in Chapter 4 were not actively distressed, particularly as the spreading of conflict across multiple areas within the relationship is a phenomenon that is typically observed in distressed couples (Bradbury & Karney, 2014; Gottman, 1979). We will further elaborate on this issue in our discussion of the limitations below.

Relational Needs and Negative Emotions[2]/Feelings

Taken together, the current data provide a positive answer to the question of whether relational need frustration affects the experience of negative feelings in intimate relationships (sub-goal b, see Figure 1 and Chapters 5 & 6). These findings coincide with emotion theories which have suggested that negative feelings serve as alarms when an individual's needs are incompatible or interfere with his or her partner's needs (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Scherer, & Ellsworth, 2009). They also fit with SDT theory, where negative feelings are described as a consequence of people coping with need frustration in a maladaptive way

[2] In the empirical studies of this dissertation, emotions were investigated by means of its subcomponent feelings.

(Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Furthermore, they are in line with previous studies, investigating the link between need dissatisfaction and negative feelings in general (Patrick et al., 2007; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000) and extend this body of research by investigating specific types of negative feelings.

More specifically, it was found that depending on the type of feeling under examination, the specific types of need frustration seem to play a different role. Regarding sadness, although across studies each specific type of need was found to be a correlate at least once, more frustration of relatedness was found to be robustly related to more sadness. The same was true for anger, with frustration of autonomy and competence being the most robust correlates. These results are in line with research that divides feelings into soft and hard feelings and has demonstrated that soft feelings are associated with relationship oriented goals and hard feelings with self-centered goals including protecting oneself from harmful situations (Sanford, 2007). The need for autonomy and competence can be captured by these latter goals, as autonomy frustration (for instance feeling controlled) and competence frustration (for instance feeling inferior and unsuccessful) can be seen as harmful to one's identity dimension (i.e., acceptance of who one is; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008). Furthermore, we can conclude that, compared to sadness and anger, fear is less consistently related to need frustration. In Chapter 5, only relatedness frustration was associated with the experience of fear, whereas in Chapter 6 (Study 2) only competence frustration was demonstrated to be a correlate of fear.

Relational Needs, Negative Emotions[3]/Feelings, and Relationship Conflict

The third part of our empirical examination involved examining the roles of negative emotions/feelings (i.e., sadness, fear, and anger) as mediators of the

[3] In the empirical studies of this dissertation, emotions were investigated by means of its subcomponent feelings.

association between need frustration (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and conflict behavior[4] (i.e., demanding and withdrawing) (subgoal (c), see Figure 1).

Before discussing the results of our mediation analyses, it is interesting to consider the link between negative feelings and conflict behavior, as this is the final association of the mediation model that has not yet been described, even though it is essential for the mediation. Generally speaking, it can be concluded that higher levels of negative feelings, especially anger, are associated with elevated levels of destructive conflict behavior, especially demanding behavior (see Chapters 5 & 6). In addition, although fear was hypothesized to be positively linked with destructive conflict behavior and therefore with withdrawing as well as demanding behavior, we found in Chapter 5 that higher levels of fear are associated with lower levels of demanding behavior and in Chapter 6 that higher levels of fear are associated with higher levels of withdrawing behavior. These results confirm previous research showing a positive association between hard feelings and more criticism of and defensiveness towards a partner. Soft feelings, on the other hand, have been found in previous studies to be less consistently associated with destructive communication because of its focus on preservation and reparation of the relationship (Sanford, 2007). Our findings further support the prevailing stance in the literature on feelings, which tends to associate anger with antagonistic tendencies such as moving against or attacking the other person in order to induce change and fear with distancing or avoiding tendencies, reducing interaction with the other person (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 2011). Regarding demanding behavior, these findings are in line with EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), in which demanding behavior is seen as especially likely to result from anger.

When we consider an overview of the significant mediation models found in our studies (see Chapter 5 & 6), we can conclude that when individuals, especially women, feel frustrated about their autonomy needs, they experience more self-protecting

[4] Evidence of conflict action tendencies as studied in Chapter 6 is considered as evidence of conflict behaviors as tendencies are seen as preceding behavior (Carver, 2006).

feelings such as anger (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Anger in turn is associated with attacking behaviors such as blaming, criticizing, and pressuring the partner for change (Roseman, 2011; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). Nevertheless, competence and relatedness frustration are also associated with demanding behavior via the experience of anger in both genders, although the evidence is less robust. In addition, in one of the studies described in Chapter 6, competence frustration was found to be associated with withdrawing behaviors, partly via the experience of fear, but only in women. These mediation models converge in general with those of EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), in which it is argued that partners' feelings, especially their reactive feelings such as anger, lead to destructive behaviors towards a partner such as demanding and withdrawing behavior in an attempt to cope with and to protect against need frustration.

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

Drawing from a relational needs perspective on conflict, the current dissertation collected data on how partners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness fuel their emotional reactions towards their partner, as well as their behavioral responses and their general level of relationship dissatisfaction. In our opinion, this dissertation both complements and extends existing theory and research.

Our findings show that when individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, or relatedness are incompatible or interfere with their partner's needs, conflict can arise, which is consistent with the definition of conflict (Lewin, 1948). More specifically, in our studies we found that the extent to which partners' needs are frustrated corresponds with how often they initiate conflict with their partner as well as how they behave and interact with their partner during conflict. Therefore, taking a *relational needs* perspective on conflict proves to be relevant.

Furthermore, the present dissertation provides continuing evidence for the importance of the need for *autonomy, competence, and relatedness* in intimate relationships. Anchored in the broader psychological literature, previous research on the psychological needs described by Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) has been predominantly conducted in a work, school, parenting, or sport context (e.g., Haerens, Aelterman, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Van Petegem, 2014; Trépanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2016). Although SDT argues that fulfillment of these needs is important in any social environment, including the context of intimate relationships (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008), few attempts had been made to provide empirical support for this theoretical suggestion.

However, our results also add further nuance to the *equal* value that is given by SDT to each specific type of need within the context of intimate relationships (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). Despite the fact that each need contributed in one way or another to the explanation of the relational outcomes included in our investigation (i.e., relationship (dis)satisfaction, conflict frequency, couples' conflict patterns), the need for relatedness was generally found to be the most important correlate of these outcomes. This makes sense from a conceptual point of view, as interdependence is the key feature defining intimate relationships (Bradbury & Karney, 2014). By contrast, each of the three needs plays a different but more or less equally relevant role in predicting the individual outcomes included in our investigation, such as partners' feelings and individual arrays of conflict behaviors. These findings suggest that it would be interesting to reconsider the importance of each need depending on which context and outcome is taken into account.

Our findings also reinforce the claim put forward by SDT, that it is important to *distinguish* between need satisfaction and need frustration, given their different associations with human function and dysfunction (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Moreover, our findings extend existing empirical support for this claim by

confirming the differential roles of need satisfaction and need frustration in relational well-being (i.e., relationship satisfaction), as distinct from individual well-being (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2011). To our knowledge, with regard to relationship conflict, this research project is the first to demonstrate that conflict is not only affected by partners' passive indifference towards each other's needs (i.e., need dissatisfaction)(see Patrick et al., 2007) but also by partners' more active and direct attempts to undermine each other's needs (i.e., need frustration).

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

In the current dissertation, samples of mainly well-functioning partners or non-distressed couples were used, which means we should be cautious when deriving clinical implications from our findings. Nevertheless, some of our findings might contribute to a more evidence-based insight into how couple therapists can understand and tackle relationship conflict and relationship dissatisfaction in couples.

For instance, our findings highlight that frustration of relational needs matters in intimate relationships as it predicts how dissatisfied partners will be with their relationship, how frequently they are likely to initiate conflict with their partner, and how they feel and behave during these conflicts. In general, in order to lessen relationship conflict and relationship dissatisfaction—the main reasons why couples seek therapy—couple therapists should recognize and tackle relational need frustration. However, as there seems to be differential effects of frustration of each need on relationships, this has implications for the order in which therapists should address each need. As relatedness frustration appears to be the most important correlate of relational outcomes, couple therapists should first of all explore partners' cold and rejecting behavior (i.e., the inducers of relatedness frustration)

and focus on reducing this behavior. Nevertheless, couple therapists should then also pay attention to any extremely controlling behaviors expressed by their clients (i.e., inducers of autonomy frustration) and partners' vague and unreasonable expectations (i.e., inducers of competence frustration), as frustration of these needs have also proved to play a role in intimate relationships for both genders.

Furthermore, our results also highlight the informative role of feelings. As has been described by emotion theories (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Moors et al., 2013; Scherer, & Ellsworth, 2009), we found that negative feelings serve as alarms when an individual's needs are incompatible or interfere with his or her partner's needs. In more detail, when partners experience anger, it might be valuable to explore to what extent their need for autonomy and competence are frustrated by their partner. Although anger is often more present in therapy sessions, it is also important to pay attention to feelings of sadness because of its demonstrated link with partners' frustrated need for relatedness. By the same token, partners themselves can be taught how to be receptive of each other's feelings, as well as the underlying frustrated needs.

Angry feelings in particular are related to destructive behaviors such as demanding and withdrawing during conflict and it is via these feelings that need frustration leads to demanding behavior. Couple therapists should be cautious of these feelings because of their detrimental associations with conflict behavior. When anger is detected in clients, it is important to temper these feelings and to convert them into more constructive feelings.

With regard to EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), evidence has been found both in our literature review and in the empirical data as described in these chapters for the broad interpretation of the three dynamics that characterize distressed couples, supporting this therapy model to a certain level. However, as needs other than those outlined by EFT-Cs may prove to be useful, EFT-C practitioners might have to broaden their view on which needs should be addressed in couple therapy.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the accomplishments of this doctoral research illustrated in the previous sections, some important limitations should be noted. In each research chapter, specific limitations have already been described but in the following paragraphs, some general limitations pertaining to this dissertation as a whole are addressed.

An important limitation is that longitudinal data on relational needs, feelings, and conflict/dissatisfaction are missing from this dissertation. Based on the theoretical assumptions of EFT-Cs, we assumed that relational need frustration leads to negative emotions/feelings, which in turn result in relationship conflict and dissatisfaction, but caution should nevertheless be exercised in inferring such causalities. Because our data are correlational in nature and were measured at a single time point, the temporal order of the processes under investigation could not be tested. For instance, in many contemporary emotion perspectives (e.g., Moors et al., 2013; Scherer & Ellsworth, 2009), the evaluation of need frustration, feelings, action tendencies, and behavior can all be seen as components of an emotional episode, in which a stimulus provokes changes without a determined sequence. It is for instance possible that action tendencies mediate the association between need frustration and feelings.

A second important limiting factor of this dissertation concerns our sample characteristics. Although we overcame the sample limitations of previous research on relational needs (i.e., samples made up of mainly students engaged in short-term to average-length relationships), our samples consisted mainly of white, heterosexual, middle-class partners or couples, who were generally satisfied and experiencing relatively low levels of need frustration in their relationships. Therefore, it is not clear to what extent our results generalize to other samples of partners, for instance partners in a same-sex relationship or partners seeking couple

therapy. Replication of these findings with samples that are more heterogeneous will be important.

Furthermore, in this doctoral dissertation a multi-methodological approach was taken in order to draw stronger conclusions. However, across the different methodological designs used in our empirical studies, we mainly relied on self-report methods, albeit both global and situational, to measure our study variables (with the exception of the observed demanding and withdrawing behavior tasks applied in Chapter 5). As these methods depend on the participant, they have the drawback that the accuracy of the reports cannot be determined. Even if participants are trying their best, their self-reports are subject to various sources of inaccuracy and bias, such as a lack of introspection or an inability to assemble all the relevant information (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007)

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As this doctoral research project is the first to systematically evaluate the detailed associations between relational needs, feelings, and relationship conflict/dissatisfaction, several directions for future research can be formulated.

First, the pioneering nature of our research indicates that it is highly important to investigate the same research hypotheses and questions in future research. Moreover, as the generalizability of our research findings has been limited by the homogeneity of our sample characteristics, future research should attempt to replicate the findings with more diverse samples. Particular attention should be paid to samples seeking couple therapy in order to provide some clear guidelines for this clinical field.

Second, although the results of the current dissertation show that the need for relatedness is generally the most consistent correlate of the relational outcomes

we were studying, unique effects were also demonstrated for the need for autonomy and competence. Consequently, each specific type of need is proved to affect intimate relationships in one way or another, in line with SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, in our opinion, future research on relational needs in intimate relationships should take a broader approach rather than being restricted to inclusion of relatedness-type needs alone (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Le & Agnew, 2001).

Third, we recommend that future research should further elaborate on the dyadic nature of need frustration in couples. In the present dissertation, a first step was taken by proving that an individual's own and the partner's need frustration is associated with how one evaluates his or her relationship and how often he or she initiates conflict with the partner. In future research it would be interesting to analyze this in greater detail, for instance by looking at actor and partner effects of need frustration on the feelings experienced by partners.

Building further on the previous recommendation, it would also be valuable to focus on sequences of conflict behavior instead of an individual's own conflict behavior whilst examining the interplay between needs, feelings, and conflict behavior. In the current dissertation, conflict patterns were only studied in association with need frustration. Future research should complement the current findings by investigating these cycles in light of emotional dynamics as well as underlying relational needs.

A final recommendation for future research involves the implementation of longitudinal research. This research will be necessary to provide evidence on the temporal and causal relations between the variables we have explored.

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Binnen onderzoek naar partnerrelaties is relationeel conflict reeds gedurende tientallen jaren een belangrijk onderwerp, en dit omwille van de vele negatieve gevolgen dat relationeel conflict met zich meebrengt (bv. Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2015). Deze negatieve gevolgen situeren zich zowel op fysiek (bv. verhoogde bloeddruk; zie Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001 voor een overzicht), psychologisch (bv. depressieve symptomen; Choi & Marks, 2008), als relationeel vlak (bv. verhoogde kans op echtscheiding; Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & McIlvane, 2010).

Daarnaast is het hebben van conflict vaak één van de voornaamste aanmeldingsklachten van koppels voor relatietherapie. In analogie hiermee blijkt uit overzichtswerken (zoals Gurman, 2008), dat conflicthantering binnen relatietherapiemodellen wordt aanzien als een belangrijke veranderingsfactor, waarop vaak wordt gefocust binnen interventies (bv. cognitieve gedragstherapie, Baucom & Epstein, 1990). Kortom, zowel de onderzoeks- als de relatietherapieliteratuur benadrukt de rol van relationeel conflict in het begrijpen en aanpakken van individueel en relationeel disfunctioneren.

EEN RELATIONELE BEHOEFTEN PERSPECTIEF OP CONFLICT

Ondanks de verscheidenheid aan definities van conflict die zowel door theoretici als onderzoekers naar voor geschoven worden (bv. Baldwin, 1992), is men het erover eens dat conflict een zekere vorm van doelinterferentie of doelincompatibiliteit tussen twee partijen inhoudt (Lewin, 1948). Toegepast op partners, gaat men ervan uit dat elke partner een reeks van korte of lange termijn doelen, behoeften of voorkeuren heeft, die bewust of onbewust, algemeen of specifiek zijn. In sommige gevallen zijn partners doelen incompatibel met elkaar of interfereert het nastreven van de eigen doelen met die van de partner, met

relationeel conflict tot gevolg (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001). Aangezien partners veelvuldig met elkaar in contact komen en sterk van elkaar afhankelijk zijn, wordt relationeel conflict beschouwd als iets onvermijdelijk en als onderdeel van het dagelijkse leven (Bradbury & Karney, 2014).

Vertrekkende vanuit de conceptualisatie van conflict in termen van doelinterferentie en doelincompatibiliteit, zijn er gedurende de laatste decennia theoretische en empirische modellen ontwikkeld over het soort doelen/behoeften die partners nastreven binnen hun partnerrelatie. Deze modellen situeren zich zowel binnen de onderzoeksliteratuur naar partnerrelaties (bv. 'Self-Expansion' model; Aron & Aron, 1996), de relatietherapieliteratuur (bv. 'Emotionally Focused' koppeltherapie; EFT-C, Johnson, 2004) als de literatuur met betrekking tot de algemene psychologie (bv. Zelf-Determinatie Theorie; ZDT, Deci & Ryan, 2000). In dit proefschrift werd toegespitst op de behoefte aan autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid binnen relaties, zoals beschreven door de ZDT. In wat volgt zullen de beweegredenen voor deze keuze verder toegelicht worden.

Partners Hun Behoefte aan Autonomie, Competentie en Verbondenheid

Ten eerste is de ZDT de enige benadering die behoeftebevrediging en behoeftefrustratie expliciet beschouwt als twee afzonderlijke concepten, in plaats van deze te conceptualiseren als tegengestelde polen (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Deze denkwijze vindt ondersteuning in het feit dat beide concepten een verschillend voorspellend effect hebben: terwijl behoeftebevrediging een betere voorspeller is van optimaal functioneren, is behoeftefrustratie sterker gerelateerd aan disfunctioneren (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, &Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Costa, Ntoumanis, & Bartholomew, 2015; Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Boone, & Mouratidis, 2013). Vertrekkende vanuit dit onderscheid, worden de bevrediging en de frustratie van autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid als

volgt gedefinieerd: (1) De bevrediging van partners hun behoefte aan autonomie wordt beschreven als het gevoel te hebben psychologisch vrij te zijn in de relatie, waar frustratie van deze behoefte ontstaat wanneer men zich gecontroleerd voelt of gedwongen wordt door de partner zich te gedragen op een bepaalde manier; (2) partners hun behoefte aan competentie is bevredigd als ze zich capabel voelen om hun vooropgestelde doelen te behalen en gefrustreerd als ze zich gefaald voelen en twijfelen aan hun capaciteiten door hun partner; (3) tot slot omvat de bevrediging van de behoefte aan verbondenheid dat partners een liefdevolle en stabiele partnerrelatie ervaren, terwijl de frustratie van deze behoefte inhoudt dat partners zich niet geliefd, eenzaam of verworpen voelen binnen hun relatie (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). Belangrijk hierbij is dat het niet bevredigen van behoeften niet gelijk staat aan behoeftefrustratie. Specifiek behelst het niet bevredigen van behoeften het passief en onverschillig zijn ten opzichte van de partners behoeften, terwijl behoeftefrustratie een meer actieve en directe belemmering van de partners behoeften omvat. Bijgevolg houdt behoeftefrustratie per definitie niet-bevrediging in, terwijl het omgekeerde niet noodzakelijk geldt (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

Ten tweede is de ZDT één van de meest omvattende modellen van relationele behoeften. Dit aangezien vele andere perspectieven, zoals bijvoorbeeld de Emotionally Focused koppeltherapie van Johnson (2004), enkel focussen op behoeften die gevat kunnen worden onder één van de drie ZDT behoeften. Zo vallen de meeste behoeften onder de behoefte aan verbondenheid, terwijl aan de behoefte aan autonomie en competentie minder aandacht wordt besteed.

Ten derde bevestigt de replicatie van de associatie tussen behoefte aan autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid enerzijds en welzijn anderzijds over verschillende culturen heen het universele belang van deze drie behoeften (Chen et al., 2015). Deze bevinding ondersteunt het belang van onderzoek naar deze drie

behoeften, alsook het belang van een theoretisch model waarin alle drie deze behoeften een plaats krijgen.

Relationele Behoeften: Bestaande Empirische Evidentie

In dit gedeelte wordt een overzicht geboden van de huidige evidentie voor de associatie tussen de behoefte aan autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid enerzijds en relationeel conflict en gerelateerde variabelen, zoals relationele tevredenheid en partners emoties tijdens conflict, anderzijds.

Relationele behoeften en relationele tevredenheid. Tot op heden hebben studies aangetoond dat meer behoeftebevrediging (autonomie, competentie, verbondenheid) geassocieerd is met meer relationele tevredenheid (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012). Ook werd gedemonstreerd dat niet enkel iemands eigen behoeftebevrediging (actor effect), maar ook die van de partner (partner effect) geassocieerd is met iemands mate van relationele tevredenheid (Patrick et al., 2007). Daarenboven toonde een longitudinale studie van Hadden, Smith en Knee (2013) aan dat de bevrediging van iemands behoefte aan verbondenheid leidt tot een verhoogde relatietevredenheid bij de partner over de tijd heen.

Relationele behoeften en relationeel conflict. In de onderzoeksliteratuur naar partnerrelaties worden conflictfrequentie, conflictgedrag en conflicttopics naar voor geschoven als de belangrijkste componenten van relationeel conflict (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Eldridge, 2009; Neff & Frye, 2009).

***Conflictfrequentie*.** Patrick en collega's (2007) vonden dat participanten die meer bevrediging van autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid ervaren in hun partnerrelatie, eveneens minder conflict rapporteren met hun partner. Bovendien wordt iemands gerapporteerde frequentie van conflict ook voorspeld door zijn/haar partners mate van behoeftebevrediging (partner effect).

***Conflictgedrag*.** Het gedrag van partners tijdens een conflict wordt in de literatuur meestal opgedeeld in constructief (bv. actief luisteren) versus destructief (bv. verwijten maken) gedrag (Birditt et al., 2010; Fincham & Beach, 1999). In sommige gevallen wordt tevens terugtrekkend gedrag (d.i., zich actief of passief distantiëren van de interactie) aan deze classificatie toegevoegd (Birditt et al., 2010). Naast individuele conflictgedragingen (d.i., hoe een individu zich gedraagt tijdens een conflict met de partner), leggen onderzoekers vaak ook de focus op het conflictgedrag van het koppel, de zogenaamde conflictgedragspatronen. Deze patronen beschrijven de manier waarop partners op elkaar reageren tijdens een conflict en kunnen in het algemeen gevat worden in drie types: wederzijds constructief gedrag, wederzijds vermijdend gedrag en eisen-terugtrekken (Eldridge, 2009). De studie van Patrick en collega's (2007) betreft een onderzoek naar hoe individuen reageren op conflict met de partner, waarbij men vond dat een hogere mate van behoeftebevrediging geassocieerd is met meer constructieve en minder destructieve reacties op conflict (actor-effecten). Met betrekking tot de destructieve responsen vond men daarenboven ook evidentie voor een partner effect.

***Conflicttopics*.** Naar ons weten is er tot op heden geen onderzoek uitgevoerd naar het verband tussen relationele behoeften enerzijds en de onderwerpen waarover koppels conflict hebben anderzijds.

Relationele behoeften en emoties. Aangezien één van de belangrijkste functies van emoties is om een (mis)match te signaleren tussen omgeving en behoeften (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Scherer, & Ellsworth, 2009), fungeren negatieve emoties vaak als een soort alarm wanneer iemands behoeften incompatibel zijn of interfereren met zijn/haar partners behoeften (Carver & Scheier, 1990). Daarnaast hebben emoties ook de functie om mensen voor te bereiden op, en te motiveren tot, een adequate reactie (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Roseman, 2011). In dezelfde lijn beschouwen therapiemodellen, zoals EFT-Cs, emoties als een mediator van het verband tussen relationele

behoeftebevrediging/frustratie en relationeel conflict/ontevredenheid (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004).

Wat betreft het verband tussen relationele behoeften en emoties demonstreerde één studie dat partners van wie de behoeften in mindere mate bevredigd zijn, meer negatieve en minder positieve emoties ervaren (Patrick et al., 2007). Het samengaan van negatieve emoties met conflict(gedrag) vervolgens, wordt eveneens ondersteund in de onderzoeksliteratuur naar partnerrelaties (bv. Gottman, 2011; Verhofstadt, Buysse, De Clercq, & Goodwin, 2005), met meer negatieve emoties gerelateerd aan meer conflictgedrag. Ook worden harde emoties (bv. woede) in verband gebracht met meer negatieve communicatie (kritiek, defensiviteit), terwijl zachte emoties (bv. verdriet) op een veel minder consistente manier geassocieerd zijn met negatieve communicatie (Sanford, 2007a).

Samenvatting. Samengevat is de evidentie voor de verbanden tussen de behoefte aan autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid enerzijds en relationeel conflict/ontevredenheid en emoties anderzijds beloftevol, maar beperkt door het miniem aantal uitgevoerde studies. Andere beperkingen van deze studies betreffen (a) de geringe aandacht voor het onderscheid tussen bevrediging en frustratie van behoeften en (b) het voornamelijk steunen op vragenlijstonderzoek (c) binnen steekproeven van studenten met een eerder kortdurende relatie.

DOELSTELLINGEN VAN HET DOCTORAATSONDERZOEK

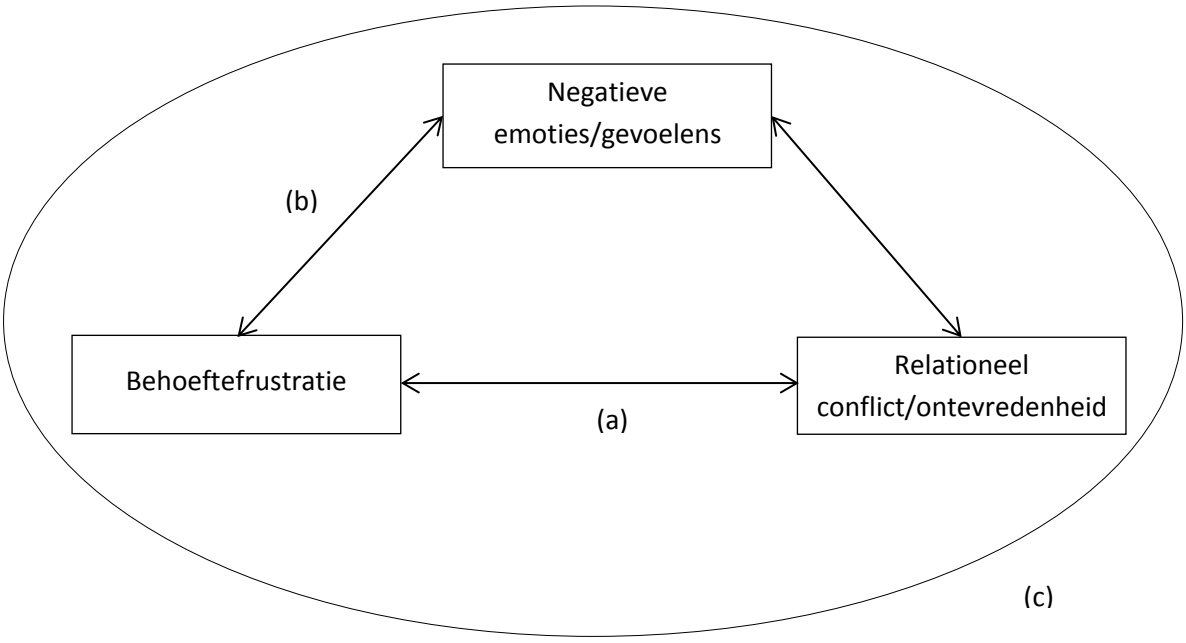
Zoals hierboven beschreven, suggereren zowel de emotie- als de relatietherapieliteratuur verbanden tussen relationele behoeften enerzijds en relationeel conflict/ontevredenheid anderzijds, met een potentiële centrale rol voor emoties. Echter, de empirische evidentie voor elk van deze verbanden is schaars en voor het samenspel tussen deze variabelen zelfs onbestaande.

Bijgevolg was het centrale doel van dit proefschrift om de verbanden tussen relationele behoeften, relationeel conflict/ontevredenheid en emoties op een systematische en rigoureuze wijze te bestuderen. In lijn met specifieke therapiemodellen (EFT-Cs; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004) enerzijds en met recente relationele behoeften perspectieven (ZDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) anderzijds, stelden we drie subdoelen op waarin we onderzochten of

(a) een hogere mate van autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid frustratie geassocieerd is met een hogere mate van relationele ontevredenheid en relationeel conflict (hogere conflictfrequentie, hoger aantal conflicttopics, minder constructief en meer destructief conflictgedrag)

(b) een hogere mate van autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid frustratie geassocieerd is met een hogere mate van verdriet, angst en woede

(c) verdriet, angst en woede het verband tussen de behoefte aan autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid enerzijds en relationeel conflict(gedrag) anderzijds medieerden (zie Figuur 1).



Figuur 1. Overzicht van de drie subdoelen.

Dit proefschrift werd aangevat met een uitgebreide review binnen de emotie-, relatietherapie- en relatie-onderzoeksliteratuur naar de verbanden tussen relationele behoeften, relationeel conflict/ontevredenheid en emoties, en dit zoals geschetst door EFT-Cs (Hoofdstuk 2). Daaropvolgend onderzochten we in een eerste empirische studie (Hoofdstuk 3) of relationele behoeftebevrediging en behoeftefrustratie correlaten waren van relationele tevredenheid. Onze tweede empirische studie (Hoofdstuk 4) had als doel om, naast een replicatie van het verband tussen relationele behoeftefrustratie en relationele ontevredenheid, het verband tussen behoeftefrustratie enerzijds en de frequentie, de topics en de patronen van conflict anderzijds te onderzoeken. In de laatste twee empirische studies bestudeerden we meer gedetailleerd de link tussen relationele behoeftefrustratie en conflictgedrag (Hoofdstuk 5) en tussen relationele behoeftefrustratie en conflict actietendensen[1] (Hoofdstuk 6) en exploreerden we of emoties, en meer specifiek gevoelens van verdriet, angst en woede, deze verbanden medieerden.

Met dit onderzoek poogden we verder tegemoet te komen aan de beperkingen van vorige studies door (a) aandacht te besteden aan het onderscheid tussen behoeftebevrediging en –frustratie, (b) verscheidene methodieken te hanteren (zowel vragenlijsten, observationeel onderzoek, als een 'recall' en 'imagine' design) en (c) gebruik te maken van steekproeven variërend in termen van relatieduur en leeftijd.

BEKNOPT OVERZICHT VAN DE BELANGRIJKSTE BEVINDINGEN

In eerste instantie werd de evidentie voor de verbanden tussen relationele behoeften, relationeel conflict/ontevredenheid en emoties -zoals beschreven door

[1] Evidentie voor conflict actietendensen (Hoofdstuk 6) wordt beschouwd als evidentie voor conflict gedragingen omwille van het feit dat deze tendensen gedrag voorafgaan (Carver, 2006).

EFT-Cs- bestudeerd binnen de emotie-, relatietherapie- en relatie-onderzoeksliteratuur. De EFT-C modellen poneren dat (a) relationeel conflict/ontevredenheid voortvloeit uit de onmogelijkheid van partners om elkaars behoeften te bevredigen, (b) onbevredigde behoeften leiden tot specifieke negatieve emoties en (c) negatieve emoties, die onbevredigde behoeften vergezellen, aanleiding geven tot specifiek conflictgedrag van partners, hetgeen over tijd resulteert in negatieve conflictpatronen. Op basis van deze review vonden we ondersteuning voor de vooropgestelde verbanden in hun algemene vorm. Echter, minder duidelijke evidentie werd gevonden voor de specifieke uitwerking van deze verbanden door EFT-Cs (bv. onbevredigde identiteitsnoden leiden tot dominant-onderwerpende interactiecycli), mede door het gebrek aan systematisch onderzoek naar deze verbanden. Aan dit hiaat poogden we dan ook in de empirische hoofdstukken (Hoofdstuk 3-6) van dit proefschrift tegemoet te komen door gebruik te maken van een rigoureuze empirische studie teneinde de vooropgestelde verbanden in het licht van recente inzichten uit de emotie- en parterrelatieliteratuur te bestuderen.

Relationele Behoeften en Relationeel Conflict/Ontevredenheid

Ons eerste subdoel bestond erin na te gaan of partners autonomie-, competentie- en verbondenheidbevrediging/frustratie een rol speelt in relationele ontevredenheid en relationeel conflict (zie Figuur 1).

Wat betreft relationele (on)tevredenheid, kunnen we concluderen dat zowel de bevrediging als de frustratie van de relationele behoeften een rol spelen, hetgeen overeenstemt met voorgaande studies (Patrick et al., 2007; Uysal et al., 2012; Hoofdstuk 3 & 4). Niettegenstaande de ZDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) poneert dat autonomie-, competentie- en verbondenheidbehoeften even belangrijk zijn in partnerrelaties, suggereren onze bevindingen dat voor de beoordeling van iemands

relatie de behoefte aan verbondenheid, gevolgd door de behoefte aan autonomie, primeert. Competentiebehoeften daarentegen blijken geen rol te spelen bij relatie(on)tevredenheid. Deze specifieke verbanden zijn in lijn met vorig onderzoek, dat reeds gelijkaardige associaties demonstreerde (Patrick et al., 2007; Uysal et al., 2012). Bovendien wordt de centrale rol van de behoefte aan verbondenheid onderstreept door de bevinding dat niet alleen iemands eigen verbondenheidfrustratie belangrijk is voor de mate van relatieontevredenheid, maar ook die van de partner.

Wat betreft relationeel conflict, wordt het verband met relationele behoeftefrustratie ondersteund doorheen de verschillende empirische hoofdstukken (Hoofdstukken 4, 5 & 6). Differentiële verbanden met autonomie-, competentie- en verbondenheidfrustratie werden gevonden, afhankelijk van de conflictcomponent die onderzocht werd.

Met betrekking tot *conflictfrequentie* werd aangetoond dat het ervaren van meer verbondenheidfrustratie gepaard gaat met het frequenter initiëren van partnerconflict (Hoofdstuk 4). Dit is in lijn met de studie van Patrick en collega's (2007), waarin verbondenheid ook het sterkste correlaat blijkt te zijn van conflictfrequentie. Tevens breidden we deze bevindingen uit door, naast een actor effect, ook een partnereffect van verbondenheidfrustratie aan te tonen.

Conflictgedrag[2] werd herhaaldelijk en met verschillende methodieken bestudeerd in dit proefschrift. In het algemeen kan geconcludeerd worden dat meer behoeftefrustratie gepaard gaat met minder constructieve conflictgedragingen/patronen en meer destructieve (Hoofdstuk 4, 5 & 6), wat eveneens in lijn ligt met voorgaand onderzoek (Patrick et al., 2007). Door meer *specifieke* gedragingen en patronen te bestuderen, poogden we daarnaast de huidige kennis omtrent behoeften en conflictgedrag verder uit te breiden. Wat

[2] Evidentie voor conflict actietendensen (Hoofdstuk 6) wordt beschouwd als evidentie voor conflict gedragingen omwille van het feit dat deze tendensen gedrag voorafgaan (Carver, 2006).

betreft *individuele* conflictgedragingen, blijkt dat relationele behoeftefrustratie in zijn geheel geassocieerd is met (geobserveerd en zelf gerapporteerd) eisend en terugtrekkend gedrag over specifieke situaties heen (Hoofdstuk 5 & 6). Niettemin het belang van elke specifieke behoefte in het verband met eisend gedrag verschilde naargelang de gehanteerde methode (d.i., observaties vs. 'recall' design vs. 'imagine' design), werd over alle studies heen het verband van elke specifieke behoefte met eisend gedrag bevestigd. Deze resultaten sluiten aan bij de conflictliteratuur, waarbinnen is aangetoond dat mensen die verandering wensen van hun partner of in de relatie typische gedragingen stellen, zoals de partner verwijten, beschuldigen en druk uitoefenen tot verandering (= eisend gedrag; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Papp, Kouros, & Cummings, 2009), en dit ongeacht de soort verandering die men wenst (Verhofstadt et al., 2005). Daarentegen vonden we minder overtuigende evidentie voor terugtrekkend gedrag. Zo werd er met observationeel onderzoek (Hoofdstuk 5) geen significante associaties gevonden met de specifieke types van behoeften, maar alleen met behoeftefrustratie in het algemeen en dit enkel bij vrouwen. Daarnaast werd er in Hoofdstuk 6 enkel significante verbanden met autonomie- en competentiefrustratie aangetoond.

Opmerkelijk, als we *patronen* van conflictgedrag in rekening brengen, vonden we dat elk patroon waarin terugtrekkend gedrag vervat zit (bv. wederzijdse vermijding of eisen-terugtrekken) wel in verband kan gebracht worden met specifieke types van behoeftefrustratie (Hoofdstuk 4). Het feit dat de resultaten inzake deze patronen, die gedemonstreerd werden in onze vragenlijststudie, meer overtuigend zijn, kan te wijten zijn aan het feit dat terugtrekkend gedrag vaak wordt gezien als het laatste stadium van een cascade van bekritiseren (= eisend gedrag), minachting en defensiviteit (Gottman, 1994). Bijgevolg, zal dit lange-termijn verband voornamelijk detecteerbaar zijn aan de hand van retrospectieve vragenlijsten, waar partners over verschillende voorgaande situaties heen een

globale perceptie dienen te vormen. Onze studies naar individuele gedragingen (Hoofdstuk 5 & 6) daarentegen maakten gebruik van een observationele, 'recall', of 'imagine' opzet, met bijgevolg specifieke situaties en een korter tijdsbestek als onderwerp van studie. Vervolgens, wanneer alle bestudeerde conflictpatronen in rekening worden gebracht (d.i., wederzijdse constructieve communicatie, wederzijdse vermijding, eisen-terugtrekken), blijkt dat conflictpatronen voornamelijk voortkomen uit verbondenheidfrustratie van beide partners. Daarnaast wordt wederzijdse constructieve communicatie en wederzijdse vermijding ook door mannen hun autonomiefrustratie gevoed en eisen-terugtrekken door mannen hun competentiefrustratie (Hoofdstuk 4).

Tot slot, werd voor het verband tussen behoeftefrustratie en het aantal onderwerpen waarover partners conflict starten, geen evidentie gevonden (Hoofdstuk 4). Deze niet-significante resultaten zijn mogelijks te wijten aan het voornamelijk in rekening brengen van tevreden koppels, terwijl de verspreiding van conflict over verscheidenen domeinen heen een typisch geobserveerd fenomeen is binnen ontevreden koppels (Bradbury & Karney, 2014; Gottman, 1979).

Relationele Behoeften en Negatieve Emoties/Gevoelens[3]

Op basis van onze data kan positief geantwoord worden op de vraag of relationele behoeftefrustratie in verband staat met het ervaren van negatieve gevoelens (Hoofdstuk 5 & 6) (zie Figuur 1). Deze bevindingen zijn in lijn met emotietheorieën (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Moors et al., 2013; Scherer, & Ellsworth, 2009) en de ZDT (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013), alsook met voorgaand onderzoek dat de link tussen niet-bevrediging van behoeften en negatieve emoties/gevoelens in het algemeen onderzocht (Patrick et al., 2007; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan,

[3] In de empirische hoofdstukken werden emotie(label)s bestudeerd a.d.h.v. de subcomponent gevoelens.

2000). Dit reeds bestaande onderzoeksveld werd in dit proefschrift uitgebreid door *specifieke* negatieve gevoelens te bestuderen, zoals verdriet, angst en woede. Immers, naargelang het soort gevoel blijkt elk type van behoeftefrustratie een verschillende rol te spelen. Bijvoorbeeld, zo blijkt verdriet voornamelijk bepaald door de frustratie van verbondenheid, terwijl de frustratie van autonomie en competentie de meest robuuste correlaten van woede zijn. Deze bevindingen liggen in lijn met onderzoek dat een onderscheid maakt tussen zachte emoties/gevoelens (zoals verdriet en angst) en harde emoties/gevoelens (zoals woede), en aantoont dat zachte emoties/gevoelens vooral gerelateerd zijn aan relationeel georiënteerde doelen, terwijl harde emoties/gevoelens vooral gerelateerd zijn aan op zichzelf gerichte en zelf beschermende doelen (Sanford, 2007b). De behoeften aan autonomie en competentie kunnen onder deze laatste soort doelen geplaatst worden, aangezien autonomie- (bv. zich gecontroleerd voelen) en competentiefrustratie (bv. zich incapabel voelen) kunnen beschouwd worden als het aantasten van iemands identiteitsdimensie (‘accepteren van hoe iemand is’; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008). Tot slot blijkt angst, in vergelijking met verdriet en woede, in mindere mate gerelateerd te zijn aan behoeftefrustratie. Zo was in Hoofdstuk 5 enkel verbondenheidfrustratie en in Hoofdstuk 6 enkel competentiefrustratie een correlaat van angst, terwijl bij verdriet en woede doorheen de verschillende hoofdstukken (Hoofdstuk 5 & 6) van het proefschrift verscheidene significante associaties met behoeftefrustratie werden gevonden.

Relationele Behoeften, Negatieve Emoties/Gevoelens[4] en Relationeel Conflict

Ons derde subdoel was om negatieve gevoelens (verdriet, angst, woede) als mediatoren van het verband tussen behoeftefrustratie (autonomie, competentie, verbondenheid) en conflictgedrag (eisen, terugtrekken) te bestuderen (zie Figuur 1).

Vooreerst wordt het verband tussen negatieve gevoelens en conflictgedrag beschreven, aangezien dit het enige verband van het mediatiemodel betreft dat nog niet besproken werd in de voorgaande paragrafen, maar niettemin essentieel is voor mediatie. Algemeen gesproken kan geconcludeerd worden dat het ervaren van meer negatieve gevoelens, voornamelijk woede, gepaard gaat met meer destructieve conflictgedragingen, voornamelijk eisend gedrag (Hoofdstuk 5 & 6). Niettegenstaande we een positieve associatie verwachtten tussen angst en destructief conflictgedrag (en dus zowel met eisend als terugtrekkend gedrag), vonden we dat meer angst geassocieerd is met minder eisend gedrag (Hoofdstuk 5) en met meer terugtrekkend gedrag (Hoofdstuk 6). Deze bevindingen worden ondersteund door de emotieliteratuur, waarbinnen woede in verband wordt gebracht met aanvallen en zich verzetten, terwijl angst in verband wordt gebracht met vermijdende tendensen, gericht op het verminderen van interactie (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 2011).

Met betrekking tot de significante mediatiemodellen (Hoofdstuk 5 & 6) vonden we dat wanneer vrouwen autonomiefrustratie ervaren, ze meer zelf-beschermende gevoelens rapporteren, zoals woede (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Woede op zijn beurt staat in verband met het aanvallen van de partner door deze te verwijten, te bekritiseren en/of te dwingen tot verandering (Roseman, 2011; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). Daarnaast blijkt ook, voor zowel vrouwen als mannen, autonomie- en verbondenheidfrustratie gerelateerd te zijn aan eisend gedrag, en dit via het ervaren van

[4] In de empirische hoofdstukken werden emotie(label)s bestudeerd a.d.h.v. de subcomponent gevoelens.

woede. Echter, evidentie hiervoor is minder overtuigend. Tenslotte werd in één studie van Hoofdstuk 6 aangetoond dat de competentiefrustratie van vrouwen in verband staat met terugtrekkend gedrag en dit gedeeltelijk via angst. Deze mediatiemodellen stemmen in het algemeen overeen met EFT-Cs (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Johnson, 2004), dewelke suggereren dat partners hun gevoelens (voornamelijk woede) leiden tot destructieve gedragingen, zoals eisend en terugtrekkend gedrag, en dit in een poging om om te gaan met en zich te beschermen tegen behoeftefrustratie.

KLINISCHE IMPLICATIES

Ten eerste wijzen onze bevindingen erop dat relationele behoeftefrustratie ertoe doet in partnerrelaties, en dit gezien het significante verband met relationele ontevredenheid enerzijds en conflictfrequentie en conflictgedrag anderzijds. Bijgevolg dienen relatietherapeuten de behoeftefrustratie van beide partners te exploreren en te doorwerken wanneer het koppel als doel stelt relationeel conflict en relationele ontevredenheid aan te pakken. Aangezien de verschillende behoeftefrustraties (d.i., frustratie van verbondenheid, autonomie en competentie) een specifiek effect hebben op de partnerrelatie, heeft dit implicaties voor de volgorde waarin de therapeut de verschillende behoeftefrustraties dient aan te pakken. Immers, aangezien verbondenheidfrustratie het meest robuust in verband staat met relationele uitkomsten, worden relatietherapeuten in eerste instantie aangeraden zich toe te spitsen op het verminderen van koud en verwerpend gedrag binnen het koppel (= inductie van verbondenheidfrustratie). In tweede instantie kan men vervolgens aandacht besteden aan partners extreem controlerend gedrag (= inductie van autonomiefrustratie) en partners vage en onredelijke verwachtingen (= inductie van competentiefrustratie), aangezien deze behoeften eveneens een rol spelen binnen de partnerrelatie.

Ten tweede wijzen onze resultaten op de kostbare informatie die gevoelens met zich meebrengen. Zo kunnen negatieve gevoelens fungeren als een alarm wanneer iemands behoeften incompatibel zijn of interfereren met zijn/haar partners behoeften. Meer specifiek kan het waardevol zijn voor relatietherapeuten om te exploreren of er sprake is van verbondenheidfrustratie wanneer partners aangeven zich verdrietig te voelen of wanneer dit gevoel geobserveerd wordt door de therapeut. Anderzijds kan woede therapeuten aanzetten om partners hun autonomie- en competentiefrustratie verder te bevragen. Evenzo kunnen partners begeleid worden in het zelf waakzaam zijn voor zowel elkaars gevoelens, als elkaars onderliggende behoeften.

Tenslotte kunnen voornamelijk gevoelens van woede in verband worden gebracht met destructieve conflictgedragingen, zoals eisend en terugtrekkend gedrag, en blijkt het voornamelijk via dit gevoel dat behoeftefrustratie leidt tot eisend gedrag. Omwille van deze schadelijke verbanden tussen woede en destructief gedrag, is het belangrijk dat relatietherapeuten voorzichtig zijn met dit gevoel, deze trachten te temperen en eventueel zelfs proberen om te buigen tot meer constructieve gevoelens.

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Data Storage Fact Sheet

Name/identifier study: Relationship satisfaction: High need satisfaction or low need frustration (Chapter 3 PhD Gaëlle Vanhee)
Author: Gaëlle Vanhee
Date: 08/11/2016

1. Contact details
==========

1a. Main researcher

- name: Gaëlle Vanhee
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2 9000 Gent
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1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

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If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies
==========
* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G., & Verhofstadt, L.L. (2016). Relationship satisfaction: High need satisfaction or low need frustration? Social Behavior and Personality, 44, 923-930. doi:10.2224/sbp.2016.44.6.923

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: the sheet applies to all the data used in the publication

3. Information about the files that have been stored
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3a. Raw data
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* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher? [X] YES / [ ] NO
If NO, please justify:

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* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?
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  - [ ] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
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  - [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: SPSS syntax and output files
  - [X] files(s) containing information about informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions:
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the stored files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify: ...
  - [ ] other files. Specify: ...

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  - [ ] research group file server
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Data Storage Fact Sheet

Name/identifier study: Why are couples fighting? A need frustration perspective on relationship conflict and dissatisfaction (Chapter 4 PhD Gaëlle Vanhee)
Author: Gaëlle Vanhee
Date: 08/11/2016

1. Contact details

1a. Main researcher

- name: Gaëlle Vanhee
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- e-mail: gaelle.vanhee@ugent.be / gaellevanhee@gmail.com

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

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2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G., Stas, L., Loeys, T., & Verhofstadt, L. (2016). Why are couples fighting? A need frustration perspective on relationship conflict and dissatisfaction. Journal of Family Therapy. Advance online publication. doi:10.1111/1467-6427.12128

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: the sheet applies to all the data used in the publication

3. Information about the files that have been stored

3a. Raw data

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  - [ ] research group file server
  - [X] other (specify): back-up on external hard drive

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3b. Other files
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  - [X] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to reported results. Specify: Information is available in a word file and PDF file (in Dutch) in which is referred to specific SPSS/R syntax and output files
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  - [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: R syntax and output files
  - [X] files(s) containing information about informed consent
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Data Storage Fact Sheet

Name/identifier study: Need Frustration and Demanding/Withdrawing Behavior During Relationship Conflict: An Observational Study on the Role of Sadness, Fear, and Anger (Chapter 5 PhD Gaëlle Vanhee)
Author: Gaëlle Vanhee
Date: 08/11/2016

1. Contact details

1a. Main researcher

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- e-mail: gaelle.vanhee@ugent.be / gaellevanhee@gmail.com

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

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2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G. M. D., & Verhofstadt, L. L. (2016). Need frustration and demanding/withdrawing behavior during relationship conflict: An observational study on the role of sadness, fear, and anger. Manuscript submitted for publication.

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: the sheet applies to all the data used in the publication

3. Information about the files that have been stored

3a. Raw data

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher? [X] YES / [ ] NO
If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?
  - [X] researcher PC
  - [ ] research group file server
  - [X] other (specify): back-up on external hard drive

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  - [ ] other (specify): ...

3b. Other files
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  - [X] file(s) containing processed data. Specify: SPSS .sav files
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Data Storage Fact Sheet

Name/identifier study: Need Frustration and Tendencies to Demand or Withdraw During Conflict: The Role of Sadness, Fear, and Anger (Chapter 6 PhD Gaëlle Vanhee)
Author: Gaëlle Vanhee
Date: 08/11/2016

1. Contact details

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1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

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- e-mail: Lesley.Verhofstadt@ugent.be

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2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Vanhee, G., Lemmens, G. M. D., Fontaine, J. R. J., Moors, A., & Verhofstadt, L. L. (2016). Need Frustration and Tendencies to Demand or Withdraw During Conflict: The Role of Sadness, Fear, and Anger. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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3. Information about the files that have been stored

3a. Raw data

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